SELF, REALITY AND REASON IN TIBETAN PHILOSOPHY

TSONGKHAPA'S QUEST FOR THE MIDDLE WAY

Thupten Jinpa

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Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way

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To Kyabje Zemey Rinpoche who inspired this work
and
To Gordon Fox and Peter Leggatt, who made it possible

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Preface

The emergence of Tsongkhapa marked an important turning point in the history of philosophy in Tibet. Following his advent in late fourteen century CE, philosophical discourse in the vast regions of Tibetan cultural sphere were changed forever. Like his predecessors in India and Tibet, however, Tsongkhapa's philosophical vision and endeavour remained firmly anchored to the basic spiritual goal of seeking freedom from unenlighted existence, a soteriological dimension that has always been a vital impetus behind the Indo-Tibetan philosophical traditions. One area where Tsongkhapa's contributions proved perhaps greatest is the exploration and elucidation of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness. Tsongkhapa did not remain content with the mere platitude that Nāgārjuna's teachings on emptiness represented the highest philosophical insight into the ultimate nature of reality. As a true philosopher, Tsongkhapa strove hard to develop a deep understanding of what such an insight might entail and what it must feel like to embody this vision of emptiness in one's life. The result is, of course, the rich gourmet of philosophical treatises from which we can still draw much benefit and intellectual nourishment even in today's highly scientific and technological era.

Today, I am extremely delighted and, at the same time, deeply humbled as well to share with others the fruits of my efforts in studying to understand the thought of this important Tibetan thinker. Although this book is a revised version of my doctorate dissertation *Self, Persons and Madhyamaka Dialectics: A Study of Tsongkhapa's Middle Way Philosophy*, which was approved for my PhD degree at Cambridge University in 1998, my study of

Tsongkhapa's philosophy of emptiness actually began many years earlier.

Inevitably, for a project such as the research and writing of this book, which has been in the making for a long period of time, I owe deep gratitude to many individuals and organisations. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my incalculable debt to my late teacher Kyabje Zemey Rinpoche whose life embodied a perfect marriage of what the Tibetans recognise as the three principal qualities of a true spiritual teacher – one who is deeply learned, is ethically sound, and is genuinely kind and compassionate. It was with Rinpoche that I first read many of Tsongkhapa's great philosophical classics. It is fitting, therefore, to dedicate this study to Rinpoche's memory.

Another teacher to whom I owe deep gratitude during my student years at Ganden is His Eminence Lati Rinpoche. I would also like to acknowledge my debts to the many scholars and colleagues at the Shartse College of Ganden monastic university, south India, with whom I have had the priviledge of engaging in lengthy exchange of views through the traditional Tibetan scholastic method of debating. Needless to say, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for whom I have had the honour of being a principal interpreter for many years, has always remained a tremendous source of inspiration. The Dalai Lama's frequent reference to Tsongkhapa's philosophical writings when giving extensive Buddhist lectures has often provided new impetus in my own understanding of Tsongkhapa's thought.

The second phase of my study of Tsongkhapa's thought took place within the confines of a Western academic discipline, namely my doctorate studies at the university of Cambridge, England. My thesis supervisor Dr Julius Lipner taught me not only how to chart the complex terrain of Western academic scholarship, he also compelled me to strive constantly towards greater clarity and precision in articulating my ideas in English. My thanks go also to Jose Cabezón, Cambell Purton, Jas Elsner and Graham Coleman for reading the draft of my doctorate thesis at its various stages and making valuable comments. In revising my PhD thesis into the present book, I have benefited greatly from the valuable criticisms and suggestions from Prof. Paul Williams and Dr. John Peacock, who were the two examiners of my doctorate dissertation. To the extent that is possible, I have also take into consideration the critical comments of Prof. David S. Ruegg, Prof. Tom Tillemans,

and Dr Joachim Runde, all of who have kindly read drafts of my papers on Tsongkhapa that have been incorporated into the first two chapters of this book. Finally to Anila Constance Miller, I owe special thanks for her extensive help in the editing process of making what is essentially an academic work into something that is more lucid and readable to a lay reader.

Behind any major undertaking of this nature are the invisible hands of the benefactors. In my own case, I have been truly blessed by the unwavering financial support of two very dear friends, Gordon Fox and Peter Leggatt, who, through the Duncan Lawrie Private Ltd., so generously provided the funding for my PhD studies at Cambridge. Their personal friendship, their financial support, and their confidence in the value of my work have always been a source of profound encouragement. My thanks also go to Daphne and Michael Astor for their friendship and generous hospitality during more than a year when I first came to Cambridge to begin my doctorate programme. I would also like to thank Girton College, Cambridge, and its community of fellows for honouring me with the Margaret Smith Research Fellowship, during the term of which much of the writing of the present volume was undertaken. Last, but not least, I would like to thank my wife Sophie Boyer-Langri whose affection has sustained me throughout the many years of my study and writing of this book.

Thupten Jinpa
Montreal, Canada

Technical Note

All page references to Tibetan works refer to typeset editions wherever such reprints are listed in the bibliography. Those works of Tsongkhapa cited from his *Collected Works* are from the Tashi Lhünpo edition, reprinted in Delhi by Ngagwang Gelek Demo, 1980. The page references to the Tibetan texts of *LTC* and *LTCh* are from those reprinted in *rJe'i gsung lta ba'i skor* (*Tsongkhapa's Writings on the Madhyamaka View*) compiled by Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Although *LTC* and *LTCh* are parts of *LRC* and *LRCh* respectively, I have listed them separately in the bibliography. By doing so, I am following an established exegetical tradition within the Geluk scholarship on Tsongkhapa whereby these two texts belonging to the large corpus of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka writings are often treated as independent treatises.

The volume numbers of Khedrup Gelek Palsang's and Gyaltsap Dharma Rinchen's *Collected Works* are from the Lhasa editions, both of which have been reprinted in New Delhi by Guru Deva Lama. The page references to Goram Sönam Senge's works are from *Collected Works of the Masters of the Sa skya Sect of Tibetan Buddhism*, Tokyo: The Tokyo Bunkyo, 1968; and of Shakya Chokden's texts from his *Collected Works*, reprinted by Kunzang Topgey in Thimpu, Bhutan, 1975. As it is difficult to discern the original dates of the printing of most Tibetan works cited here, I have provided the dates of the authors where they are known. This is to give the reader a sense of the historical period of the literature. All dates of the Tibetan thinkers are based on the chronology of events found in the appendix of *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (*Extensive Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary*) and

Tseten Shapdrung's *bsTan rtsis kun las btus pa* (*Compendium of Chronologies*), which are based on Gö Lotsawa Shönu-pal's *Blue Annals*, amongst others. In cases where these two Tibetan sources disagree, I have opted for the view of the latter. The dates of the Indian thinkers are taken from Hajime Nakamura's *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* and, in cases where they do not appear there, from David S. Ruegg's *The Literature of the Indian Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India*.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Tibetan and Indian texts provided in this study are mine. Although translations of the Indian texts are based primarily on a reading of their Tibetan versions, I have also cited the Sanskrit texts where deemed necessary. As it is unlikely that many readers will have access to the same typeset editions of the Tibetan texts referred to, I have provided the full text of the Tibetan (in transliteration) whenever a direct citation appears in the main body of the discourse. Any additions introduced into the translations to help clarify the reading of the text are inserted between brackets. All Tibetan names of people, places, and schools are written in phonetics for easy pronunciation based on a system that is, although not formalized, used widely by Tibetans writing in English. A chart in the appendix gives their correspondence according to the Wylie transliteration system as developed in Turrell Wylie's 'A Standard System of Transcription,' *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies* 22 (1957), pp. 261–7. To ensure easy identification of the texts by specialists, I have given the title of the Tibetan texts in the Wylie system, with the first 'root' Tibetan letter capitalized. The titles of all Tsongkhapa's works and a few other titles amongst the Tibetan works cited in this study are also given in English. This does not, however, suggest that these texts exist in English translations. Where such translations do exist, I have also provided their details in the bibliography.

Bibliographical Abbreviations

AK	Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa*
AKBh	Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*
BCA	Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*
BTP	Tsongkhapa, et al. *Anthology of 'Guides to the Middle View'* (*dBu ma'i lta khrid phyogs bsdebs*)
CS	Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka*
CST	Candrakīrti, *Catuḥśatakaṭīkā*
GR	Tsongkhapa, *Elucidation of the Intention: A Thorough Exposition of Madhyamakāvatāra* (*dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal*)
JIP	*Journal of Indian Philosophy*
JRAS	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
KK	Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Eloquence: A Detailed Exposition of the Difficult Points of the Doctrine of Mind and Foundational Consciousness* (*Yid dang kun gzhi'i dka' ba'i gnas rgya cher 'grel pa legs par bshad pa'i rgya mtsho*)
LCD	Tsongkhapa, et al. *Four Interwoven Annotations on the Difficult Points of the 'Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment'* (*Lam rim mchan bzhi bsgrags*)
LN	Tsongkhapa, *Essence of Eloquence* (*Drang nges legs bshad snying po*)
LRC	Tsongkhapa, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (*Lam rim chen mo*)
LRCh	Tsongkhapa, *Condensed Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim chung ngu*)
LS	Tsongkhapa, *Golden Rosary* (*Legs bshad gser gyi phreng ba*)

LTC	Tsongkhapa, 'Special Insight' (*Lhag mthong chen mo*)
LTCh	Tsongkhapa, 'Abridged Special Insight' (*Lhag mthong chung ngu*)
MA	Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatāra*
MABh	Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*
MMK	Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*
P	Peking edition of *The Tibetan Canon*, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, 1957
PEW	*Philosophy East and West*
PSP	Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā*
PV	Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika*
Queries	Tsongkhapa, *Queries from a Pure Heart* (*Dri ba lhag bsam rab dkar*)
RG	Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Thorough Exposition of Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*dBu ma rtsa ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa shes rab ces bya ba'i rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho*)
TKSB	*Collected Works of Tsongkhapa* (*rJe tsong kha pa chen po'i gsung 'bum*)
Toh	*A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons*, edited by Prof. Hakuji Ui, and *A Complete Catalogue of the Tohoku University Collection of Tibetan Works on Buddhism*, edited by Prof. Yensho Kanakura, Japan: Sendai, 1934 and 1935
VV	Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*
WSTB	*Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde*
WZKS	*Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süasiens*

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Introduction

It is said that when Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), Tibet's foremost religious reformer and one of its greatest philosophers, finally arrived at the perfect 'middle view,' he experienced a powerful surge of admiration and devotion for the Buddha.[1] This combination of deep reverence and insight, together with a profound sense of joy, that followed this breakthrough in Tsongkhapa's philosophical thinking inspired him to compose one of the most eloquent praises to the Buddha ever written in Tibetan.[2] In perfectly metered poetry, Tsongkhapa celebrates the Buddha's teachings on the principle of *dependent origination* and expresses his deep appreciation to the Buddha for having taught this profound truth. At the heart of Tsongkhapa's inner exultation is also a sense of wonder and amazement at the convergence between what appear to be two contradictory natures of things – their lack of intrinsic existence on the one hand, and their coming into being by means of dependent origination on the other. This study seeks to articulate, as far as is possible in contemporary language, Tsongkhapa's insight into this profound Middle Way.

My own study of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka (Middle Way) philosophy began during my monastic years at Ganden Monastery, South India. Having received my early education in the classical Tibetan system of learning, I was privileged to encounter Tsongkhapa's thought as a living tradition enriched by a vast collection of secondary commentarial literature and an associated oral tradition. In the monastic colleges, only after years of preparation studying the basics of epistemology and various other philosophical themes are students introduced to what may be called

the great classics of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy. Several principal elements constitute a student monk's study of a text. He first memorizes the root verses (where these exist); he then receives a reading with commentary from a learned scholar; he subsequently studies the text himself; and finally, he debates with colleagues the various philosophical and exegetical issues related to the text. Given Tsongkhapa's towering stature within the history of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet, and perhaps more importantly, given that his writings have assumed an almost canonical status within the dominant Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism, an extensive exegetical tradition has evolved with respect to reading Tsongkhapa's thought. Thus, for a Tibetan monk, reading a text by Tsongkhapa is a living experience, not at all akin to encountering, as a contemporary writer puts it, 'strings of written symbols representing a dead language for which only a limited corpus of texts now exists.'[3]

In addition to the above, years of training in the fundamental theories and practices of Tibetan Buddhism, including studying the major Buddhist philosophical schools and, especially, initiation into the central debates of the continuing, living tradition, provide a monk with a unique context. For example, he learns to be aware of (a) the key passages that are traditionally seen as problematic for an exegesis of Tsongkhapa, (b) areas of thought that point to a need for deeper philosophical enquiry, and (c) issues that are of central importance in understanding the points of divergence between Tsongkhapa and his predecessors. Perhaps most importantly, a classical monastic approach encourages a monk to cultivate an appreciation for Tsongkhapa's philosophy as part of a continuing lineage of thought. This ensures that, psychologically at least, a student's approach to studying Tsongkhapa's thought does not become such that 'the lineaments of his masks [are] discernible imperfectly, but the mental events that accompanied the composition of the text are even more inscrutable.'[4]

Given this background, it should not come as a surprise that a significant perspective that I bring to bear upon my study of Tsongkhapa is what might be called in anthropological terms 'a native's point of view.' This means to read Tsongkhapa, as it were, from within his own writings and inherited philosophical and intellectual legacies. This approach results in a more sympathetic reading of the material at hand than that generally employed by traditional Western academic scholars. Furthermore, contrary to what many textual theorists of the post-modern age recommend,[5]

I have accorded greater priority to the place of the author when determining the meaning of his works. For example, I have given priority to Tsongkhapa's own intended meaning and the stated motivations that underlie his philosophical enterprise. I have 'listened' to him when he says that he is arguing for a specific thesis. More importantly, as the traditional Geluk exegesis of Tsongkhapa suggests, I have made the fundamental assumption that there is a systematic approach in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought and that it contains a high degree of cohesion and completeness. This does not mean that I have ruled out *a priori* any inconsistencies, gaps, and so on in his thinking. It does mean, however, that I believe there is an overall framework of intended coherence in Tsongkhapa's thought and that I take it seriously.

The second perspective that I have brought to this study is what we can call the 'contemporary philosopher's point of view.' The significance and merits of this have been made more than evident to me as a result of my studies at Cambridge University, England. Vital to applying this perspective is to read Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka writings as primarily philosophical, even by contemporary Western philosophical standards. It also entails making sense of Tsongkhapa's views within the language and conceptual frameworks familiar to contemporary Western thought. Thus, I have engaged in this study of Tsongkhapa's thought from the standpoint of 'comparative horizons' by showing that his views can have significance across boundaries of language, culture, and era. In this regard, especially given that this study has been undertaken in English, as a key methodological approach I have appropriated contemporary Western philosophical language to articulate Tsongkhapa's views on a number of key issues, such as questions of personal identity and so on. Underlying this approach is the principal assumption that general philosophical discourse is, in fact, possible. I have also made the additional assumption that there are definitely some issues, concerns, and questions that are universal to all traditions of philosophical thinking. For example, many of the questions that pertain to the self – such as its existence (or lack of it), its identity, its relation with the external world, and so on – appear in the philosophical discourse of many traditions. Although the language and conceptual framework within which these issues are raised may be specific to that particular intellectual tradition, many of the underlying concerns that are being addressed remain universal.

In practical terms, approaching Tsongkhapa's thought from the perspective of comparative horizons primarily involves bearing in mind two key methodological questions:

(1) Does Tsongkhapa's thought suggest answers to perennial philosophical questions that continue to vex us even in our time?
(2) Does it push us to extend the horizons of current Western intellectual and philosophical paradigms?

Having said this, I must point out that I am not engaged here in a comparative study. My task is to reconstruct Tsongkhapa's thought and articulate it in contemporary language in the most coherent way. This activity of reconstruction must, in fact, precede any process of systematic comparison, for a genuine comparative study involves (to borrow Richard Robinson's term) 'multi-system' comparisons – i.e., comparisons between systems of thought that are purported to be complete in themselves.[6] Thus, I have avoided comparing specific aspects of Tsongkhapa's thought with specific aspects of Western thought in order to maintain a clear focus on my primary task of elucidating and understanding the basic material of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought.

Once again, in the context of how to avoid obscuring Tsongkhapa's text with heavily laden interpretations, I must also address the question of how the works of Tsongkhapa's Tibetan critics should appropriately be treated. Here, I have again chosen not to go into the details of these Tibetan polemics, apart from addressing a few specific objections that I think require serious discussion. Delving too deeply into this critical literature would divert our attention from the development of the main line of thought. This is again a methodological choice that I have adopted in order not to clutter my study with peripheral details that are irrelevant to our main purpose. Nevertheless, where I feel that these critical views will help sharpen our understanding of the distinctiveness of Tsongkhapa's reading of Madhyamaka, I shall not hesitate to bring them into the debate.

Similar methodological considerations have also informed my treatment of the enormous Geluk commentarial literature on Tsongkhapa, especially the large corpus of *yig cha* (textbooks) of the individual colleges of the Geluk monasteries. As a graduate of Ganden Monastic University, I am intimately familiar with much of the scholastic literature on Tsongkhapa-exegesis within the Geluk school. Because my main concern here is to present

Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy in a manner uncluttered by scholastic or contemporary representations, I have chosen not to go into the specifics of the variances and divergences to be found in scholastic interpretations of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka.

One further consideration relates to the current historical coincidence of Tibetan Madhyamaka studies. Given that a great deal of modern Western scholarship on Tibetan Madhyamaka has been based on the writings of later Geluk thinkers, there is often the danger of reading Tsongkhapa's philosophy as articulated in contemporary Western language almost exclusively through the lens of the later Geluk presentation of Madhyamaka. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there is the danger of committing the methodological error of assuming that Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka equals Geluk Madhyamaka. The simple reason why the two cannot be equated is that the latter includes an enormous body of diverse commentarial literature that, although rich and illuminating in its own right, is distinct from Tsongkhapa's writings. Tsongkhapa belongs to what Ruegg describes as the 'classical period' of Tibetan Buddhism, a high point in Tibet's intellectual history that was characterized by penetrating philosophical thought, systematic hermeneutics, and thorough exegetical writings. In contrast, many subsequent Geluk Madhyamaka writers belong to the 'scholastic period,' which was 'dominated by 'interpretation' (often epigonal) comprising continued exegetical and hermeneutical activity largely within the bounds of the different *chos lugs*.'[7]

In this study, I have endeavoured to ground all my interpretations in Tsongkhapa's own works so that, to the extent possible, the story of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy is told through Tsongkhapa's own voice, albeit in a contemporary idiom. I have also sought to arrive at an understanding of Tsongkhapa's thought through reading and cross-referencing all of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka writings, a basic requirement when one reads the thought of any philosopher, Western or Tibetan. From the standpoint of critical Western scholarship, a significant consequence of reading Tsongkhapa's own words free of later scholastic interpretations is that it allows us to remain more sensitive to issues of development and change in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought.[8] I have indicated places where I see such a developmental process taking place, by comparing Tsongkhapa's earlier and later writings on the same themes. This will perhaps come as a surprise to my fellow Tibetan Mādhyamikas and even to some Western scholars of Geluk

Madhyamaka as well who tend to accept the traditional Geluk scholastic view that Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought emerged *en bloc* rather than gradually, over time. In that this direct (that is, free of later scholastic interpretation) reading of Tsongkhapa represents a crucial methodological principle here, the present study can be regarded as based almost exclusively on primary literature.

We must also consider the place that the Indian Madhyamaka texts – those works that were the primary source of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy – have had in this study. Given that Tsongkhapa's own reading of this literature was based on Tibetan translations rather than on the Sanskrit originals, I too have used the Tibetan translations of those Indian works as my primary sources of reference. Of course, this raises the issue of Tsongkhapa's own treatment of those Indian sources. Admittedly, Tsongkhapa sometimes stretches the reading of the Indian texts to an extent that is perhaps too 'creative' and may be textually hard to justify. For example, Paul Williams has drawn attention to the problematic nature of Tsongkhapa's use of a passage from Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to develop the principle of 'identifying the object of negation' (*dgag bya ngos 'dzin*) in the Madhyamaka dialectic.[9] Similarly, in refining the criteria of what constitutes 'intrinsic existence,' Tsongkhapa constantly refers to Candrakīrti's reading of Nāgārjuna. However, when actually formulating these criteria, he appears to have drawn more from his own original philosophical thinking than from the Indian textual evidence.[10] Thus, Tsongkhapa's way of relating to the Indian texts seems to be somewhat strained and even paradoxical in that it is characterized by a peculiar combination of original thought on the one hand, and care in referring back to the original Indian sources on the other.[11] However, despite its enormous importance to a historical understanding of Tsongkhapa's place within Tibetan Madhyamaka, the critical question of Tsongkhapa's treatment of the Indian sources lies outside the scope of our study.

As part of our methodological considerations, I should also say a few words about my own approach to the question of translation. Although this study is not a work of translation in the conventional sense, general questions relating to the problem of translation have had a direct bearing on it.[12] Let me state at the outset that I do not generally believe in the possibility of a one-to-one correspondence of words between English and an Asian language such as Tibetan.

This position is based on certain premises. It is my view that different cultures reflect different worldviews that, in turn, require different linguistic and conceptual frameworks. This is not to say, however, that whatever can be said in one language cannot be translated into another. My vision of contrasting linguistic families and their attendant conceptual frameworks is that of multiple, overlapping circles. The fact that I *can express* Tsongkhapa's views in English and also, more importantly, the fact that you *can understand* these views, indicates that significant compatibilities and co-resonances exist between the two cognitive structures. In addition, certain languages possess larger vocabularies to express different shades of meaning for certain words or in particular contexts; hence, different terms are used in different contexts. In contrast, the Tibetan language is highly contextual and, more often than not, a single word can possess multiple meanings often determinable only by its context. In such a case, a one-word-to-one-word approach in translation severely restricts the expressive potential of the language into which the translation is being undertaken. In fact, a dogmatic approach defeats the purpose of translation. The following citation lucidly outlines the principles that govern my approach to translation:

> By 'translation' I mean what Dryden had in mind when he said of his own translation, 'I have endeavoured to make Virgil speak such English as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age.' Richard Gombrich made a similar point when he called literal translation 'an intellectual fallacy and an aesthetic monstrosity.' For a translation to be *accurate* (as opposed to literal) it has to produce an effect on the reader that is similar to the effect it would have produced on an informed reader in the original language. If the original is meant to be obscure, the translation should be obscure. If the original is meant to be clear, the translation should be clear. The problem for the translator is that clarity in one language is not necessarily clarity in another.[13]

Having said all this, I do believe that the situation is quite different with regard to key technical terms. Here, I think it is possible to develop a specialized vocabulary that is adequate to transpose into the host language all the strictures and stipulations of the term of the donor language. A technical term is, as Robinson puts it, 'one

that is specialized to an office in the system that the writer sets up to describe his object domain. The office of the term is identified informally by the average reader and formally by the systematic reader through collocation of structures that belong to the system.'[14] Nevertheless, a good translator from Tibetan into English, for example, must endeavour to keep the size of such a technical vocabulary to a minimum. Failure to do so will result in a work that is not only clumsy but perhaps even insulting to the sensibilities of a native English reader. In brief, the work becomes what can be simply described as 'non-English.' The greatest challenge here is to present Tsongkhapa's views and arguments in language that is comprehensible and at the same time retains the original flavour of the author's unique style.

Tsongkhapa was one of the most careful of all Tibetan writers; in particular, the philosophical works of his so-called 'later period'[15] reflect a tremendous sophistication and subtlety in his use of language. Elegance, clarity, and economy of words are the hallmarks of Tsongkhapa's philosophical writing. Furthermore, as a noted poet, Tsongkhapa was also sensitive to the poetic dimensions of the written word.[16] For example, the prose of his masterpiece *Essence of Eloquence*[17] is endowed with a natural rhythm that allows it to be easily read aloud as a recited literary piece. In view of this, I shall endeavour to retain, insofar as it is possible to do so in a second language, a deep sensitivity to Tsongkhapa's use of language.

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge a further influence on this study, namely, the targeted readership that I have kept in mind. I have written this study to appeal principally to three groups of readers: Western-trained philosophers, both professionals and students who may or may not have a background in Buddhist studies; fellow specialists in Tibetan Buddhist studies, both professionals and students; and general readers who are interested in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, including, of course, practising Buddhists.

To the first group, I wish to portray Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka as a philosophy worthy of serious consideration, and to suggest that engaging with Tsongkhapa's thought in creative debate can lead to exciting philosophical developments. With this group in mind, I have striven to maintain extreme care in my use of language, avoiding especially the temptation to use jargon that may be familiar only to a handful of specialists in Tibetan

Buddhist studies. To the extent possible, I have taken great pains to present this work in readily understandable English. However, in keeping the specialist reader in mind, I have provided original Tibetan terms, where useful, in standard Wylie transliteration as well as Sanskrit (where possible), with their English equivalents in the main body of the text. In addition, to help verify my reading of Tsongkhapa, in the endnotes I have provided extensive citations from Tsongkhapa's own writings, with the full Tibetan text.

And last, for the benefit of the general reader, I have attempted to keep my presentation as uncluttered by scholarly apparatus as possible without jeopardizing academic rigour and critical engagement with the subject. For example, I have given all Tibetan names of people, places, and schools in simple, readable phonetics in order to ease English pronunciation, instead of using the usual academic convention of writing these in Wylie transliteration. Also, information that is primarily of interest to the specialist reader – such as the full Tibetan text of citations, technical Tibetan terms, references to Tibetan or contemporary Western scholarly works, bibliographical details, and so on – have all been relegated to the endnotes. The rationale for my approach has been to ensure that the reading of the main text is rendered as uncluttered, free-flowing, and lucid as possible.

Tsongkhapa was a prolific writer whose works cover a vast expanse of classical Tibetan and Buddhist scholarship. There are two primary topics, however, that together dominate the bulk of Tsongkhapa's written works. The first is the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness as propounded by the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250 CE), especially as interpreted by the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka school[18] of Buddhapālita (fourth century CE) and Candrakīrti (seventh century CE). The other is what is known as the highest yoga (*anuttarayoga*) class of Vajrayāna Buddhism. In his works on Madhyamaka philosophy, the first of his two primary areas of focus, Tsongkhapa develops a highly systematic reading of Nāgārjuna's thought as interpreted by Candrakīrti, combined with the sophistication of Dharmakīrti's (c. 650 CE) epistemological language. The result of this intellectual enterprise is a profoundly powerful philosophical synthesis that is perhaps best described simply as 'Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka.' This study deals with this principal focus of Tsongkhapa's thought and writings.

The following study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1, together with this introduction, deals with issues of method and context. Most of the various methodological considerations that underlie our study of Tsongkhapa's thought have already been addressed in this introduction; additional methodological issues will be dealt with in chapter 1. In exploring the historical and intellectual context of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka, chapter 1 also endeavours to discern the various points of divergence between Tsongkhapa and his Tibetan predecessors. An important aspect of this task has been to identify Tsongkhapa's key qualms with respect to early Tibetan views of the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness. Given that many of these qualms pertain to issues and debates that are central to Tibetan philosophy as a whole, chapter 1 can also be seen as providing a brief overview of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka view itself.

Chapter 2 concerns Tsongkhapa's attempt to define the scope of dialectical analysis in Madhyamaka reasoning. This chapter demonstrates that underlying his extensive explication of Madhyamaka philosophical analysis is Tsongkhapa's deep concern with delineating clearly the parameters of Madhyamaka reasoning, in a way that such reasoning could not be mistakenly used to negate everything, especially not ethics and religious activity. In examining Tsongkhapa's understanding and application of the Madhyamaka dialectic, our study strives to remain sensitive to his forms of argumentation and logical analysis, as well as to his use of rhetoric, all of which are so crucial to Tsongkhapa's style of philosophising. As will become clear, for Tsongkhapa methodology is an integral part of philosophy. Thus, chapter 2 deals with Tsongkhapa's philosophical method.

Chapter 3 explores Tsongkhapa's critique of the self and his assertion that the final meaning of the Buddha's teaching on 'no-self' must be understood in terms of the Madhyamaka's rejection of intrinsic existence (*niḥsvabhāvatā*). Following the steps of Buddhist argumentation against selfhood, this chapter analyses the concept of intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*), a concept that is categorically and vehemently rejected by Tsongkhapa. Thus, chapter 3 presents Tsongkhapa's actual application of Madhyamaka reasoning to questions pertaining to the existence and identity of the self. Together, chapters 2 and 3 offer an in-depth presentation of what can be called the 'deconstructive' aspect of Tsongkhapa's philosophy.

Chapter 4 goes on to make a systematic presentation of Tsongkhapa's 'constructive' theory of persons as it is understood in contemporary Western philosophical discourse. By addressing such issues as personal identity, individuation, continuity, I-consciousness, memory, and so on, this chapter explores Tsongkhapa's answers to the basic question of *who* or *what* is a person. This second dimension of Tsongkhapa's thought is critical, if he is to be regarded as consistent with his fundamental concern of ensuring that Madhyamaka reasoning does not result in nihilism. Thus, I will show how Tsongkhapa accords a meaningful level of reality to the self and the world while at the same time adhering to the deconstructive reasoning of the Mādhyamikas. Together, chapters 3 and 4 also demonstrate that, unlike many other Buddhist thinkers, Tsongkhapa maintains a non-reductionist model of personal identity.

Finally, chapter 5 addresses the ontological question, In what sense, according to Tsongkhapa, can persons and the world be said to exist? In addressing this question, this chapter presents the framework of his nominalist ontology and explores the concept of reality that emerges from Tsongkhapa's deconstructive and reconstructive approaches to self and persons. In the final section of the chapter, the various conclusions pertaining to the epistemological and ontological questions of self are reviewed within the context of Buddhist soteriology. In this way, the chapter deals with the central issues concerning the relationship between critical reasoning, no-self, and religious experience as perceived by Tsongkhapa. The study concludes with comments on some key areas of Tsongkhapa's philosophy that require further research.

CHAPTER ONE

Context and Methodological Issues

The historical contexts of Tsongkhapa's thought

Tsongkhapa is perhaps known best by many as the great fourteenth-century reformer of Buddhism in Tibet. The impact of his reform reached many areas of Tibet's intellectual scholarship and religious praxis, as well as redefining the place of religious institutions within society. For example, Tsongkhapa's revitalization of monasticism in Tibet left a lasting impact upon the country's educational, social, and political life, consequences that are still felt to this day. In the philosophical field, Tsongkhapa's vehement arguments that critical reasoning must be an essential element of the path to enlightenment, his novel interpretation of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka philosophy, and his marriage of Dharmakīrti's epistemology to Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness as read through Candrakīrti have all led to the emergence of a highly influential trend of philosophical thinking in Tibet. Finally, Tsongkhapa's systematic Madhyamaka reading of the *anuttarayogatantra* teachings of Vajrayāna Buddhism gave rise to a new way of understanding, at levels of both theory and practice, the convergence between Vajrayāna and many of the key elements of mainstream Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Leaving aside the question of their ultimate effect on Tibetan Buddhism as a whole, Tsongkhapa's contributions must be acknowledged as having greatly enriched Tibet's scholarly tradition as well as its religious life. Still, in my view, Tsongkhapa cannot be construed as some kind of revolutionary. He neither aspired nor did he set out to establish any revolutionary school of Buddhism.

'Revitalization' rather than 'revolution' may be closer to Tsongkhapa's own description of his task. This is, in a way, comparable to Tsongkhapa's own personal assessment of the role of both Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga within the world of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.[1] He calls both of them *shingtai sölje chenpo* (*shing rta'i srol 'byed chen po*), literally meaning 'great initiators of the carriageways.' They are so called because, in Tsongkhapa's view, Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, by founding the Madhyamaka and Cittamātra schools respectively, have widened the 'great' Mahāyāna path. In other words, Tsongkhapa sees them as the great revitalizers of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition.

Of course, much of Tsongkhapa's achievement can be attributed to his time and circumstances in history. With Atīśa's arrival in Tibet in the eleventh century, the so-called second dissemination of Buddhism in that country had firmly re-established there the predominance of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka school of philosophy.[2] Secondly, with Patsap Nyima Drak's (b. 1045) translation of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* and *Madhyamakāvatāra* in the eleventh century, the philosophical literature of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka school became more accessible in Tibet.[3] Until then, the dominant school of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet had been that of Śāntarakṣita's (ca 740–810) Madhyamaka-Svātantrika-Yogācāra.[4] Furthermore, with the translation of the logical and epistemological works of Dharmakīrti in the eleventh century and also the composition of the first indigenous textbooks on logic by Chapa Chökyi Senge (1109–69) and Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251), the study of Buddhist logic and epistemology had become well established within the educational curriculum of the great monastic learning centres. We know that by Tsongkhapa's time Sangphu and Sakya monasteries had emerged as two of the most important centres of philosophical studies in central Tibet. Thus, Tsongkhapa must have inherited much of his interest in Buddhist scholasticism from the time he spent at these great seats of learning. Perhaps the most important of all legacies was the standardization of the first Tibetan Buddhist canon – the *kangyur* (translations of the scriptures attributed to the Buddha) and the *tangyur* (translations of Indian commentarial literature). This standard canon assumed its final form through the work of the great Tibetan encyclopedist Butön Rinchen Drup (1290–1364) in the mid-fourteenth century.

Arguably, for Tsongkhapa the most important historical event, which had a profound impact upon the intellectual climate in

ancient Tibet, was the royal debate (or debates) that took place at Samye towards the end of the eighth century.[5] The two sides in the debate were the Simultaneist (*gcig bcar ba*) school of the Ch'an teacher Hva-shang Mohoyen and the Gradualist (*rim gyis pa*) school of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism represented by Kamalaśīla (ca 760–815). Tibetan sources characterize the dispute as centred on the question of whether or not enlightenment is attained through a gradual and prolonged process of reflection and praxis, or in the form of an instantaneous experience. The central point at issue was the role of discursive analysis in the path to enlightenment. The Simultaneists rejected this, whereas the Gradualists insisted on its indispensability. Hence, my choice of the two terms here to characterize the two views. The debate represented a rivalry for dominance in Tibet between two distinct forms of Buddhism. One was the tradition of a non-scholastic and somewhat quietist version of Chinese Ch'an Buddhism; the other was the scholastically well developed and monastically organized Buddhism of India.[6] According to the early Tibetan literature dealing with the proceedings of this debate, the Indian school represented by Kamalaśīla and his Tibetan supporters was declared the victor. As a result, the Tibetan king at that time, Trisong Detsen (730–845?), issued a royal decree announcing that, from then on,

> ... the people of Tibet should uphold the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. They should also engage in the way of life of the six perfections and practice the ten virtuous deeds. As regards a meditative tradition, they must train their minds in the development of the three insights and be firmly rooted in a perfect unity of tranquil abiding and special insight, the union of skilful means and wisdom.[7]

Given all these historical antecedents, as the fourteenth century was drawing to a close, the stage was set for the entrance of a grand synthesizer. Had it not been for these historical conditions, Tsongkhapa's contributions would have had far less impact and significance.

Questions of originality and development in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy

As was noted earlier, Tsongkhapa's writings cover a wide spectrum of classical Indian and Tibetan scholarship. The focus of this study,

however, is Tsongkhapa's contributions in the field of philosophy in general, and his systematic re-interpretation of the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness in particular. Generally speaking, the history of the development of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet is highly complex, and it is still early days before the trajectory of its path can be fully worked out. One of the greatest difficulties lies in the fact that to understand this history it is not adequate simply to trace the lineage of the Indian Madhyamaka texts in Tibet. It is also necessary to reconstruct the evolution of Madhyamaka thought in Tibet. By 'evolution' I am referring to the question of how Tibetan interpreters of the Madhyamaka tradition appropriated the tenets of the Indian Madhyamaka schools.[8] There is also the critical issue of whether or not Tibetan Mādhyamikas took the 'Madhyamaka discourse' further than their Indian predecessors. My own view is that they did. Tsongkhapa is unarguably a towering figure in this development. Tsongkhapa wrote extensively on Madhyamaka philosophy, including a number of highly influential commentaries on some of the principal Indian Madhyamaka texts. In these works, Tsongkhapa takes great pains to explore the wider philosophical implications of the key insight in Madhyamaka that things and events are devoid of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity.

An important element in my approach in reconstructing Tsongkhapa's key philosophical ideas is what I would call 'listening' to Tsongkhapa whenever he says that he is arguing for a certain standpoint. A vital part of this listening is to appreciate the overall framework of the author's thought. This means that, in addition to an appreciation of the historical contexts, the reader must also be sensitive to the issues that are of greatest concern to the author. Such sensitivity naturally calls for a more sympathetic reading, thus according certain priority to the author, more so than to subsequent commentaries, when interpreting his works. This does not, however, preclude a critical approach. It *does* entail making the key assumption that the aspirations, concerns, and beliefs of the author have an important bearing on the meaning of his works. In other words, in attempting to understand the meaning of a text, the reader must bring to bear upon this task the overall *project* of the author. This is especially important when reading an author who is writing within a continuing lineage of thought. Tsongkhapa himself is sensitive to this point. Towards the end of *LTC*, Tsongkhapa makes an important hermeneutical point.

He writes that a skilful Mahayana teacher is one who is ever sensitive to the context and overall lineage of thought of a given text. By referring to other works of the author, the teacher will be able to draw out in this way what remains implicit and sometimes unexplained in a particular text.[9] As I see it, there are two elements to this hermeneutical requirement. The first is to discern what the author himself feels to be of greatest concern, and the second is to appreciate the inherited legacies of the tradition within which the author is writing.

Methodologically speaking, it is difficult at this stage of Tsongkhapa scholarship to determine to what extent Tsongkhapa's views on the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness can be regarded as genuinely original. This raises a serious issue with regard to the question of interpretation in our exegesis of Tsongkhapa's philosophical writings. This problem is, however, not unique to Tsongkhapa's thought, and there is the broader issue of how one might discern originality and creativity in the context of any system of thought that consciously operates within a continuing lineage of thought. Nevertheless, as far as the written legacy of Tsongkhapa is concerned, there are, fortunately, no significant disputes with regard to the authorship of his principal works. By Tsongkhapa's time, the tradition of compiling and publishing the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) of noted authors had been firmly established in Tibet. Although it is difficult to infer the exact dates of the actual compiling of Tsongkhapa's collected works, it is safe to surmise that this must have happened not too long after his death.[10] Apart from a few items, the authorship of all works found in the standard editions of Tsongkhapa's collected works is undisputed.[11] More importantly for our purpose, all major writings on Madhyamaka philosophy by Tsongkhapa are not only extant,[12] but their authorship remains beyond doubt. We are also fortunate to have in Khedrup's (1385–1438) *Haven of Faith*,[13] the official biography of Tsongkhapa, a tentative dating of most of these important works on Madhyamaka, thus giving us a workable basis to discern the stages of development in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought.

For traditional Tibetan commentators the question of originality is not an issue. As Gareth Sparham points out, even Tsongkhapa himself, along with his followers, 'believed that his insights were free from originality and that his vision was the exact vision of the Buddha and the Mādhyamika saints described in their various sūtras and śāstras . . .'[14] However, from the perspective of modern

scholarship, the problem of the originality of Tsongkhapa's thought remains an important issue. If nothing else, determining the answer to this question is critical at least for our historical understanding of the development of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet. Admittedly, in light of the lack of clear textual evidence of the doctrinal positions of the Kadam school, it is difficult to discern how much of Tsongkhapa's views are original. The problem is further complicated by the tradition among Tibetan authors of attributing all one's insights to an earlier 'authoritative' (*tshad ldan*) master. This is characteristic of a scholarship that operates within a system where tradition (*gsung rgyun*) is perceived as the main source of validation, and a subsequent commentator's task is seen as discerning the ultimate purport (*dgongs pa mthar thug*) of the master or masters. For example, Tsongkhapa attributes almost all his views on Madhyamaka philosophy to Buddhapālita (fourth century CE) and Candrakīrti (seventh century CE), whom in turn Tsongkhapa sees as expounding the ultimate standpoint of Nāgārjuna (second century CE) and Āryadeva (second century CE), the founders of the Indian Madhyamaka school. Nevertheless, insofar as an interpretation of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka philosophy is concerned, Tsongkhapa departs significantly from both his contemporary and earlier Tibetan thinkers.

The traditional Geluk understanding of these deviations in Tsongkhapa's thought attributes the development of his distinct reading of Madhyamaka philosophy to a mystical communion he is reported to have had with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. For the contemporary reader, this kind of invocation to mystic guidance may be seen as having a special methodological significance, i.e., that the rhetoric of revelation is often a device signalling a fundamental shift away from an existing tradition. In other words, it allows the claimant to put forth his or her original and often revolutionary ideas without jeopardising the need for faithfulness to a tradition. It is interesting that the tradition Tsongkhapa is claiming to honour is, in a strict sense, not the existing system in Tibet; rather, it appears to be the tradition of Mañjuśrī as revealed in a mystic vision! Whatever their origin, it seems clear that many of Tsongkhapa's views on Madhyamaka were perceived by his peers and subsequent critics as heterodox. This is especially evident from the intensity of the criticism Tsongkhapa's thought attracted from Tibetan scholars, particularly from within the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism.[15] For example, the Sakya critic Gowo Rapjampa

Sönam Senge (1429–89), from here onward referred to by his short name, Gorampa, accuses Tsongkhapa of having deviated from the mainstream of the Tibetan Madhyamaka tradition. He even goes so far as to suggest that Tsongkhapa's so-called mystical communion may have been inspired by an evil demon![16] Gorampa makes the point that Tsongkhapa himself (and presumably his followers) asserts that many of his own (Tsongkhapa's) views on Madhyamaka are unique and that others also perceive them in such light.[17] In contrast, among Tsongkhapa's own contemporary followers, there are those, such as Khedrup, whose writings testify to what that author understood to be Tsongkhapa's unique reading of Madhyamaka philosophy.[18] There is also an important extant Madhyamaka work[19] by Rendawa Shönu Lodrö (1349–1412), the noted Sakya master and the foremost teacher of Tsongkhapa, that may help us to discern the points of divergence in Tsongkhapa's thought in the later part of his life. Furthermore, in addition to Gorampa's writings,[20] the polemics of Taktsang Lotsawa Sherap Rinchen[21] (b. 1405), of the controversial Sakya scholar Serdok Panchen Shakya Chokden[22] (1428–1507), and of the Kagyü master Karmapa Mikyö Dorje[23] (1507–54) help provide us with a clearer picture of what was considered by many thinkers to be controversial in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka. The point I am making here is that in spite of the enormous difficulties at present in reconstructing a comprehensive picture of the intellectual scene of late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Tibet, there is an adequate textual basis to discern the extent of originality in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought.

Regarding the question of development in Tsongkhapa's thought, even the traditional Tibetan scholarship on Tsongkhapa recognizes a fundamental change in his philosophy between the earlier and later stages of his life. For example, Khedrup, Tsongkhapa's principal biographer and one of his principal students, writes that at one time Tsongkhapa 'felt more comfortable with the interpretation of the Madhyamaka view as one that denies all standpoints and accepts no thesis of its own.'[24] As I shall show later in this chapter, this so-called 'no-thesis' view becomes one of the principal objects of Tsongkhapa's critiques in his later writings. Nevertheless, an unspoken methodological principle has been adopted in Tibetan scholarship on Tsongkhapa, a convention shared at least among his Geluk interpreters, to treat only those writings by Tsongkhapa after a certain age as representing his

'mature' standpoint.[25] It was roughly around the age of forty that Tsongkhapa began to write his *summa*, *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (*LCR*).[26] Certainly, this methodological choice seems to accord with the dating of all his works on Madhyamaka philosophy, which are subsequent to the above period. It can be surmised, therefore, that any subsequent changes in Tsongkhapa's thought can be regarded as minor and, in terms of philosophical substance, cosmetic.[27] Consequently, for our present study I would say there are enough grounds to assume that Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought represents a coherent system.

Textual sources for an exegesis of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy

Given the central importance of Tsongkhapa's works within the intellectual history of the Madhyamaka in Tibet, it is not surprising to find an enormous quantity of commentarial literature within the Geluk school dealing with interpretations of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy. Interestingly, from quite an early stage some of the influential successors of Tsongkhapa to 'the throne of Ganden' – the abbotship of Tsongkhapa's Ganden Monastery – sought to develop a homogeneous reading of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy.[28] This process gave rise to a whole genre of commentarial literature within Geluk scholarship known as *yig cha* (textbooks).[29] At the heart of this 'later' Geluk commentarial tradition is the general consensus to accept Gyaltsap Dharma Rinchen (1364–1432), from here on referred to simply as Gyaltsap, and Khedrup Gelek Palsang (1385–1438) as Tsongkhapa's two closest disciples. Together, the three are regarded as *je yapse sum* (supreme father and his two sons). In view of this, Geluk scholarship treats Gyaltsap and Khedrup as the most reliable authorities on the hermeneutics of understanding the more obscure points in Tsongkhapa's writings. In fact, the works of these two thinkers often enjoy the same status as those of Tsongkhapa for determining the Geluk standpoint on specific philosophical or doctrinal questions. This is especially true in areas where Tsongkhapa did not write any substantial work. Gyaltsap and Khedrup on Buddhist logic and epistemology, and the latter on *Kālacakratantra*, are cases in point.

In my own reading, I shall rely mainly on Tsongkhapa's own Madhyamaka writings together with notes produced from his

lectures. Here, I shall distinguish three categories. In their order of importance, they are:

(1) texts that are generally considered the standard Madhyamaka classics of Tsongkhapa,
(2) Tsongkhapa's miscellaneous Madhyamaka writings, and
(3) notes taken at Tsongkhapa's lectures on various aspects of Madhyamaka thought.

In the first category are: 'Special Insight' (*LTC*),[30] *Essence of True Eloquence* (*LN*),[31] *Ocean of Reasonings: An Exposition of Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (*RG*),[32] 'Abridged Special Insight' (*LTCh*),[33] and finally, *An Elucidation of the Intent: A Commentary on Madhyamakāvatāra* (*GR*).[34] Together, these works formed the basis for a novel interpretation of the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness, giving rise to a whole new school of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Tibet, namely, the Geluk school. All of these works have attracted voluminous commentaries from subsequent Geluk scholars.

In the second category are other works that are found in Tsongkhapa's miscellaneous writings (*gsung thor bu*). These writings have great significance for our understanding in that they often shed light on areas not explicit in the standard classics. I take these 'miscellaneous' works seriously, for it is in this genre that sometimes the personality of the author can be more easily glimpsed. From among these, a particular mention should be made of *Queries from a Pure Heart*,[35] from here on referred to simply as *Queries*, the various scrolls exchanged between Tsongkhapa and his teacher Rendawa,[36] and the letters to Lama Umapa Pawo Dorje,[37] the mystic who acted as the medium for Tsongkhapa's communication with Mañjuśrī, not to mention the shorter versions of *Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim*) written in verse. Of special interest is *A Rosary of Supreme Medicinal Nectar*,[38] an instruction on meditating on emptiness that is supposed to have evolved through Tsongkhapa's communication with the Nyingma/Kadam mystic Lhodrak Drupchen Namkha Gyaltsen (1326–1401). Non-Geluk commentators often cite this small work as evidence to suggest that Tsongkhapa's ultimate standpoint on emptiness is actually close to that of the Dzokchen view of the Nyingma school.[39]

In the third group I have included a number of Tsongkhapa's pieces on Madhyamaka that are either short pieces written by Tsongkhapa himself as memorandums (*brjed byang*) or lecture notes

(*zin bris*) taken by either Gyaltsap or Khedrup at Tsongkhapa's teachings on various Indian Madhyamaka classics. These include his *On Eight Difficult Points of Mūlamadhyamakārikā*,[40] *Lecture Notes on Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*,[41] *Lecture Notes on the 'Wisdom' Chapter of Bodhicaryāvatāra*,[42] *Notes on Madhyamakālaṃkāra*,[43] and various manuals of meditation on emptiness known as *'Guide to the View' (lta khrid)*.[44] In this category, I have also included *An Extensive Memorandum on Epistemology*,[45] a major work that situates Buddhist soteriology within Dharmakīrti's epistemological tradition. In addition, I have used *Ocean of Eloquence, being an Exposition of the Difficult Points of 'Mind and Foundational Consciousness'*[46] and *Golden Rosary*,[47] the extensive commentary on Maitreya's *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* and its commentary by Haribhadra. Though not direct works on Madhyamaka, and also despite their belonging to a period prior to Tsongkhapa's 'maturity,' these two works deserve serious attention. Not only are they substantial works by Tsongkhapa, but they also provide valuable insights into the intellectual climate of fourteenth-century Tibet. All these works form the core of our textual sources for the study of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy.

Tsongkhapa's qualms about early Tibetan understandings of emptiness[48]

In identifying what I perceive as those elements central to the interpretation of Madhyamaka philosophy in Tibet that were of greatest concern to Tsongkhapa, I shall use primarily two sources, both written by Tsongkhapa as he first embarked on his new mission following his reported mystic encounter with Mañjuśrī. The first is an eloquent open letter addressed to 'the great meditators of Tibet' (*bod kyi sgom chen pa rnams*). Entitled *Queries from a Pure Heart Calling Attention to Crucial Religious Issues*,[49] this succinct work reflects the deep passion and concern that Tsongkhapa appears to have felt concerning the fate of Buddhist philosophy and practice in Tibet at the time. The work, running less than twenty folios, primarily consists of a series of rhetorical questions related to both the practical and philosophical aspects of Buddhism as it was then understood and followed in Tibet. My second source is *LTC*, the section on the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness from Tsongkhapa's monumental work *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path* (*LRC*).[50] Given that my

primary concern here is to underline Tsongkhapa's qualms, I shall not address the question of identifying the objects of his criticism nor the issue of whether or not his characterization of their views is accurate. This is a methodological choice I am compelled to adopt, as such an enterprise lies beyond the scope of our present study. Tsongkhapa very rarely mentions by name the objects of his critiques and to identify the specific proponents of these views would inevitably involve an extensive detective work.

Although the first source, *Queries*, is found in the standard collection of Tsongkhapa's works, some Tibetan scholars have raised doubts about its authorship, notably Jhampa Lingpa Sonam Namgyal (1400–1475).[51] However, noted scholars like Shakya Chokden (1428–1507)[52] of Sakya, Pema Karpo (1527–1592)[53] of the Kagyü school, Gomchen Ngagwang Drakpa (1418–1496),[54] and Panchen Lobsang Chögyen (1570–1662)[55] of Tsongkhapa's own Geluk lineage have accepted the letter's authenticity and have responded to the questions posed in the letter. The Tibetan doxographer Thuken Chökyi Nyima (1737–1802), after drawing attention to this divergence of opinion among Tibetan scholars on the authorship of the letter, states that he finds it difficult to make any categorical judgement on the matter.[56] According to Thuken, the following seem to be the key objections of those who dispute Tsongkhapa's authorship of the letter. First, they maintain not only that the letter contains certain colloquial expressions that are untypical of Tsongkhapa's general written work, but also that the overall style of the writing is very different from the mainstream works of Tsongkhapa. Secondly, they argue that in the colophon, the author writes his name as 'the one known to be under the care of Guru Mañjughoṣa,'[57] an epithet that is, in their opinion, totally unknown. Thirdly, there is no mention of the work in any writings of the immediate disciples of Tsongkhapa.[58]

So where does this leave us with the question of the letter's authenticity? My own view is that none of these objections is persuasive enough to question the inclusion of this work in Tsongkhapa's collected works. Since the letter appears to have been written as an extemporaneous statement, its colloquial style is not surprising. The main intent of the letter is to draw immediate attention to critical religious and philosophical issues of Tsongkhapa's time; thus, linguistic and philosophical rigour was probably not an important concern for the author. What better approach than to adopt a rhetorical tone that allows the author a certain

licence to caricature his opponents' views? As for the epithet 'the one known to be under the care of Guru Mañjughoṣa,' I do not think that it is so untypical as has been suggested by those who dispute Tsongkhapa's authorship of the letter. In fact, the epithet can be read as an early indication of Tsongkhapa's own acknowledgement of his purported mystical experience referred to in all his biographies. It is also not surprising that there is no mention of the letter in the writings of Tsongkhapa's immediate students. From the perspective of later traditional Tibetan scholarship, the letter has greater value for a historian than for a philosopher. Predictably, religious historians such as Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa (1504–66) and the regent Sangye Gyatso (1652–1705) have made significant references to the letter.[59] If this letter is conclusively shown not to be by Tsongkhapa, then doubts can be raised about the authorship of a few other significant works as well, especially *A Reply to Je Rendawa*[60] and *A Scroll for Je Rendawa on the Essential Points of Instruction of Mañjuśrī*,[61] both found in Tsongkhapa's collected works. Space prevents me from going more deeply into this. Nevertheless, I would like to state that the validity of my attempt to discern Tsongkhapa's key religious and philosophical concerns does not hinge entirely on this letter being authentically attributed to Tsongkhapa. Regardless of the validity of this attribution, its significance for both historians and religious scholars working in the field of Tibetan studies cannot be disputed. From a historical point of view, this letter provides us with much insight into the central points of the doctrinal disputes between the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism around the fourteenth century. Furthermore, I believe this work occupies an important place within the genre of Tibetan polemical literature. It is surprising that no one among contemporary scholars of Tibetan Buddhism seems to have paid serious attention to this seminal work. To date, there is hardly a reference to the work in any modern Tibetan Buddhist scholarship, let alone a translation of the text![62]

The work, if we accept it as written by Tsongkhapa as the Tibetan editors of Tsongkhapa's collected works maintain, represents Tsongkhapa's first public acknowledgement of a deep dissatisfaction that it seems he felt with the intellectual and philosophical climate of his time, especially towards the dominant views on emptiness. As well as it indicates the need he felt for its revitalization, this letter can be seen as representing an 'official' announcement on Tsongkhapa's part of his departure from many

of the established Tibetan readings of Madhyamaka emptiness theory. It also seems to bridge a critical gap in our historical understanding of the processes and evolution of Tsongkhapa's thought. Perhaps even more importantly, the work gives us an early intimation of the issues that were to occupy Tsongkhapa's mind for a long time to come. Without this letter, we would have to assume that nothing heralded Tsongkhapa's departure from the Tibetan scholarship on Madhyamaka philosophy of his contemporaries before the time of his writing the extensive section on the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness in *LRC*.[63] I find this hard to accept. Therefore, at least for the time being, I shall assume the validity of this letter's ascription to Tsongkhapa.

Let us now return to the main thread of our discussion, that is, underlining Tsongkhapa's key philosophical concerns regarding Tibetan interpretations of Madhyamaka philosophy. In the language of Tibetan scholasticism, we can summarise Tsongkhapa's concerns about the fate of Madhyamaka in Tibet under three categories. The first is what Tsongkhapa saw as the nihilistic reading of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka that, in his view, denigrated the validity of our everyday world of experience. Secondly, Tsongkhapa vehemently opposed what is known as the Shentong Madhyamaka view of the Jonang school. He regarded this reading of Madhyamaka as absolutist. In opposing this view, Tsongkhapa was following in the footsteps of thinkers like Butön, and his own teacher Rendawa. Tsongkhapa's critical views on the Shentong Madhyamaka appear to have been formed even during the earlier period of his intellectual life. For example, in *Golden Rosary* Tsongkhapa subjects Shentong absolutism to severe criticism.[64] The thrust of his critique seems to be to demonstrate the absence of any Indian Madhyamaka literary sources for the Shentong view. Tsongkhapa argues that there can only be three possible Indian Madhyamaka sources[65] for the Jonangpas' central claim that ultimate truth must be understood as an absolute; but he concludes that none of these sources actually support the Shentong standpoint. Tsongkhapa concludes his critique by exhorting others to discard this view as one would spit out a particle of dust![66] Finally, Tsongkhapa was deeply concerned about what he considered to be the harmful legacies from Hva-shang in the tenets of some Tibetan Mādhyamika thinkers. The first two concerns pertain to philosophical issues, while the third relates more to meditative praxis.[67]

From a contemporary philosopher's perspective, one can say that first and foremost Tsongkhapa was deeply concerned by what he saw as a general lack of philosophical and analytical rigour in Tibetan thinking. This, he believed, was not only contradictory to Mahāyāna Buddhist Madhyamaka philosophy towards which almost every Tibetan Buddhist denomination claimed strict adherence, but it also went against the basic spirit of the Buddhist path. There existed, in his view, a pervasive sense of philosophical 'naivety' in Tibet and a dangerous trend towards a form of anti-rationalism that were integrally connected. According to Tsongkhapa, this combination of philosophical naivety and anti-rationalism had profound religious and ethical ramifications.

By 'philosophical naivety,' I am referring to all the various Tibetan interpretations of the Madhyamaka view of emptiness that in Tsongkhapa's view deny in one form or another the reality of the empirical world. In its most extreme form, Tsongkhapa believed, this denial derives from a literal reading of Madhyamaka literature, and asserts that 'things are neither existent nor non-existent.' 'Naivists' also include those who conceive emptiness to be mere nothingness. According to this view, the empirical world becomes nothing but mere illusion. In a broad sense, even for Tsongkhapa, Mādhyamikas do accept that our lived world of empirical experience is like an illusion. However, the difference is that, according to Tsongkhapa, objects of the everyday world are illusion-*like* and not *illusions* as many other Tibetan Mādhyamikas appear to claim.[68]

Such philosophical naivety is also closely related to epistemological scepticism, one of the two principal sources of anti-rationalism in Tibet (the other being an over-emphasis on the mystical perspectives of tantra). Again, according to Tsongkhapa, this stems from a false understanding of the Madhyamaka view of epistemology, especially its position on the nature of *prajñā*, or insight into the ultimate nature of reality. In actual fact, the sceptic rejects the very possibility of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*), especially in relation to emptiness. From a linguistic perspective, this viewpoint 'upholds the doctrine of ineffability, that nothing can be predicated of anything else, that any description of emptiness is useless, all being equally distant from the ultimate.'[69] All of this then becomes naturally tied up with the position that Madhyamaka philosophy has no views of its own.[70] For Tsongkhapa, such a position reflects a certain naivety if not intellectual laziness towards the problem of

reconciling the empirical reality of all things and events with their essential emptiness or lack of intrinsic existence and identity. According to Tsongkhapa, this problem of reconciliation is the crux of the Madhyamaka philosophical endeavour. He argues that the naivists' confusions stem from a deep misunderstanding concerning the very meaning of the name Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika (a proponent of the *reductio ad absurdum* argument) in contrast with a Svātantrika-Mādhyamika (a proponent of the autonomous syllogism). Tsongkhapa, in *LTC*, schematically lists four such positions and enters into a detailed critique of these standpoints.[71]

According to Tsongkhapa, the first position, which has been attributed to the Indian Jayānanda (twelfth century CE), reflects an epistemological scepticism concerning the validation of the 'tri-modal' character of a logical argument. This tri-modal characteristic is the standard post-Dharmakīrti convention of Buddhist logic. The second position is a universal scepticism that rejects the very possibility of a 'valid means to knowledge' (*pramāṇa*) and contends that, when engaged in philosophical argumentation, all that we can have, and indeed all that we need, is a verbal consent from our opponent. Tsongkhapa attributes this position to those he calls 'certain Tibetan translators who are students of Jayānanda.'[72] Bhaso Chökyi Gyaltsen (1402–73) identifies Khu Lotsawa (twelfth century CE), a disciple of Jayānanda, as one of these.[73] Tsongkhapa attributes the third position to 'those professing to be present-day Prāsaṅgikas.'[74] This position maintains that a Prāsaṅgika does not have any thesis of his own, whether in the conventional or the ultimate sense. Tsongkhapa attributes the fourth position to 'some earlier Mādhyamikas who claim to be followers of Candrakīrti,'[75] possibly a reference to Majha Jhangchup Tsöndrü (d. 1285) and other followers (possibly Shang Thangsakpa) of Patshap Lotsawa, the translator of Candrakīrti's works.[76] According to Tsongkhapa, the proponents of this last position fail to appreciate the subtlety of the Prāsaṅgika's critique of the concept of autonomous syllogism. The above positions, as far as Tsongkhapa is concerned, are, at best, agnostic and, at worst, nihilistic points of view that are furthermost from the tenets of the Madhyamaka school, and especially from the tradition of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti. For Tsongkhapa, the middle way of Madhyamaka philosophy cannot be characterized as nihilism, agnosticism, or even as mere relativism.

In the parlance of Tibetan scholasticism, this agnostic interpretation of the central Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness is

known as 'Madhyamaka's (alleged) thesis-lessness.' Tsongkhapa is fully aware that there are passages strewn throughout the works of some of the principal Indian Mādhyamika writers that, if read literally, can be understood as supporting the 'no-thesis' interpretation. As examples, Tsongkhapa cites the following key passages to illustrate this point.

> *Nāgārjuna*:
> If I had posited some theses,
> Then I would be open to objections.
> As I do not have any thesis,
> I am free of all faults.[77]

> *Āryadeva*:
> He who does not have a standpoint
> Of 'is,' 'is not,' 'both,' or 'neither'
> Cannot be criticised
> For any flaws for a long while.[78]

> *Candrakīrti*:
> One who is a Mādhyamika cannot derive inferences from autonomous reasoning, for he does not accept the other's thesis.[79]

Based on a literal reading of passages such as those cited above, many earlier Tibetan Mādhyamikas have, mistakenly in Tsongkhapa's view, consistently argued that Prāsaṅgikas literally do not have any positions of their own. According to this reading, it is suggested that the Prāsaṅgikas are concerned only with the refutation of others' views. Needless to say, the 'no-thesis' view is a complex position containing several components. For example, in *LTC* Tsongkhapa identifies the following four main premises of the 'no-thesis' view:

(a) that critical reasoning, which enquires into the question of whether or not things exist in terms of their intrinsic being, negates all phenomena;
(b) that phenomena such as origination, cessation, and so on cannot be objects of valid cognition, for it has been stated in the Madhyamaka scriptures that perceptions, such as those of the visual, auditory, olfactory spheres, and so on, cannot be accepted as valid;
(c) that phenomena such as origination, cessation, and so on cannot be accepted as existent even on a conventional level, for

the reasoning that negates origination on the ultimate level also negates it on the conventional level as well; and
(d) that there is nothing that does not fall into the categories of existence, non-existence, both, and neither, and that these four possibilities have been revealed to be untenable.

Needless to say, Tsongkhapa subjects these four premises to detailed criticism.[80] Nonetheless, ontologically speaking, for proponents of the 'no-thesis' view, reality literally cannot be said to be any of the following possibilities: 'is,' 'is not,' 'both is and is not,' and 'neither is nor is not.' Reality, though absolute, is ineffable and indeterminate, for it is beyond language and thought. The phenomenal world is merely an illusion, the perception of which will disappear without any trace at the stage of final enlightenment. Epistemologically, proponents of this view maintain a thoroughgoing scepticism concerning the possibility of *any* valid means to knowledge, especially with regard to the ultimate nature of things. The 'real,' in their view, can only be intuited in a state of nonconceptuality. From a linguistic point of view, one could say that proponents of the 'no-thesis' view hold that language has no real bearing on reality, let alone any intrinsic, objective referential ground. Similarly, they maintain that logic too cannot lead to any genuine inferential knowledge of the ultimate nature of reality. Arguments are at best *ad hominem* or *reductio ad absurdum*, or what the Buddhists would call *prāsaṅga*. So in their view, the true middle (*madhyama*) is this absence of commitment to any position of one's own. Tsongkhapa vehemently rejects all of this.

Tsongkhapa's refutation of the various strands of the 'no-thesis' view is too complex to be dealt with here; also there exists substantial contemporary literature on the general debates on whether or not Mādhyamikas have views of their own.[81] Suffice it here to underline that the crux of Tsongkhapa's critique pertains to what he understands to be the unique Prāsaṅgika reading of the principle of dependent origination. He argues that since dependent origination is the 'content' or 'meaning' (*don*) of emptiness, by denigrating the world of dependent origination the proponents of the 'no-thesis' view are rejecting what is perhaps the heart of the Prāsaṅgika philosophy of emptiness.[82] Not only is it possible for the emptiness of intrinsic existence and dependent origination to co-exist in a common locus, the very fact of dependence is, to Tsongkhapa's mind, the highest proof of the absence of intrinsic

existence.[83] In fact, Tsongkhapa wrote an eloquent praise of the Buddha in verse form called *In Praise of Dependent Origination*[84] that celebrates the realization of the profound convergence between emptiness and dependent origination. To conceive otherwise – that is, to hold that dependent origination entails intrinsic existence – is to turn everything topsy-turvy. In Tsongkhapa's own words, this is like a god turning into a devil, a Tibetan equivalent of Nāgārjuna's metaphor of medicine becoming poison![85]

From Tsongkhapa's point of view, a denial of even the conventional existence of the world of dependent origination stems from a metaphysical assumption that is shared also by all essentialist schools – that is, existence (*yod pa*) is equivalent to existence-by-means-of-intrinsic-nature (*rang bzhin gyis yod pa*). For example, in *LTC*, Tsongkhapa writes,

> If one asserts that so long as phenomena such as sprouts and so on exist, they do so by means of their intrinsic nature, and that if they do not exist by means of their intrinsic nature, [then] they do not exist [at all], one is bound to fall into either of the two extremes. [But] this way of understanding [the mode of being of things] is not different from the essentialists.[86]

As for the definition of nihilism, Tsongkhapa argues that there is no substantial difference between the Prāsaṅgika and the essentialist: both agree that a repudiation of causality must lie at the heart of nihilism. The difference between the two parties is this. While the Prāsaṅgika does not reject causality, the realist assumes that by rejecting any notion of intrinsic existence the Prāsaṅgika *is* rejecting the principle of causality as well. This is the principal reason why the Prāsaṅgikas are referred to as nihilists by other Buddhist schools and have often been the object of vehement criticism by these schools.[87] According to Tsongkhapa, Prāsaṅgikas *have* theses and views of their own, but no theses that adhere to any notions of intrinsic being. The Prāsaṅgika rejects intrinsic existence (*svabhāvasiddhi*); thus, emptiness of intrinsic existence *is* their position. Similarly, Prāsaṅgikas accept the nominal existence of persons; this *too* is their standpoint. More importantly, as Buddhists, Prāsaṅgikas must maintain that insight into 'no-self' (*anātman*) lies at the heart of the path to liberation. Thus, Tsongkhapa concludes:

> Therefore, the root cause of all problems is the reifying ignorance (*avidyā*) that apprehends intrinsic being. The insight into 'no-self,' or absence of intrinsic existence, alone is that which eliminates, by means of direct opposition to its mode of apprehension (*'dzin stangs dngos su 'gal ba'i sgo nas*), this [reifying consciousness].[88]

In effect, Tsongkhapa is rejecting the 'no-thesis' view on the grounds that it is essentially nihilistic. In *LTC* Tsongkhapa cites extensively from Candrakīrti to demonstrate a categorical difference between the similar assertions of the Prāsaṅgikas and the Carvakas (Indian materialists) that the laws of *karma* do not exist intrinsically.[89] According to Tsongkhapa and Candrakīrti, the Carvakas' assertion constitutes nihilism, while the Prāsaṅgikas' does not. This is because the first denies even the conventional reality of *karma*, while the latter does not. For Tsongkhapa, Candrakīrti's insistence on and appreciation of this distinction implies his acceptance of the nominal existence of the laws of *karma*, a view that, in Tsongkhapa's mind, contradicts the claims of the 'no-thesis' standpoint. From a methodological perspective, Tsongkhapa regards the 'no-thesis' view as reflecting a serious inability to appreciate the significance of the Prāsaṅgikas' use of a unique form of negation. As we shall see in chapter 2, this form of negation is absolute and does not commit the protagonist to any existential implication. Yet to be effective in its application, even this form of negation presupposes an acceptance of the law of the excluded middle. Tsongkhapa, in his support, cites the following passage from *Vigrahavyāvartanī*:

> If the absence of intrinsic being is reversed,
> Intrinsic existence [its opposite] becomes established.[90]

If one does not subscribe to the fundamental principles of logic, according to Tsongkhapa, one can only end up in a state of indecision. Perhaps Tsongkhapa's criticism of the 'no-thesis' view is ultimately soteriological, at least in its intent. For if the proponents of the 'no-thesis' view are right, then insight into the middle way becomes essentially a state of mind that is a withdrawal of all cognitive activity rather than an active state of 'knowing.' This, for Tsongkhapa, is nothing but the ghost of Hva-shang's pernicious no-thought view, albeit in a new guise.[91]

According to Tsongkhapa, the trouble with the 'no-thesis' view is that, when pushed to its logical end, it slides into a form of

ontological nihilism. Tsongkhapa's strategy to ensure that Madhyamaka philosophy does not remain open to the charge of nihilism involves two principal approaches. The first is primarily a negative approach in that Tsongkhapa stipulates the parameters of Madhyamaka dialectics in such a way that the deconstructive arguments of emptiness philosophy *cannot* and *do not* undermine the validity of ethics and religious activity. In other words, Tsongkhapa attempts to delineate the scope of negation in Madhyamaka reasoning so that the reality of the conventional world is not negated.[92] The second element of Tsongkhapa's strategy is constructive in its approach in that it entails developing a systematic and logically coherent account of conventional existence.[93] The primary motive here is to ensure that a clear distinction is maintained between the conventional reality of things and events on the one hand and metaphysical speculations about their ontological status on the other. Tsongkhapa rejects the latter, and argues that existence equals conventional existence.

According to Tsongkhapa, agnostic and nihilistic tendencies can also permeate one's understanding of the nature of the path, and even affect one's very conception of the nature of enlightenment. In his *Queries*, Tsongkhapa points to some opposing trends prevalent in the Tibet of his time in understanding the process of enlightenment. He writes:

> Generally speaking, there seem to be many diverse opinions concerning the way in which the 'view' [of emptiness] is perceived as arising.[94] One group of opinions maintains that all forms of conceptualization, whether they be positive or negative, are to be discarded. Yet others hold the directly opposing view that not only are all forms of conceptuality not to be discarded, but the greater the proliferation of concepts the more enhanced one's experiential realization will become. [They maintain that] this is analogous to the fact that the more fuel you burn, the larger the size of the flame.
>
> Again, another group of opinions contends that conceptualization itself is the fundamental ignorance (*ma rig pa*, Skt. *avidyā*). This view is primarily based on the quote 'Conceptualization is indeed the great ignorance.'[95] But others maintain the opposite view, that conceptualization is, in actual fact, the pristine 'buddha body of reality' (*dharmakāya*). These two views represent two opposing sides of the same spectrum.

> Again, some characterize buddhahood, or *nirvāṇa*, as the state when the mind abides in a natural equilibrium free of distraction. [And they maintain that] the moment the mind wavers, it is in the state of ordinary existence, or *saṃsāra*. Yet others contend that even when conceptual thought processes occur, no matter how long the processes last, if you observe with a single-pointed mind, *dharmakāya* appears vividly. These two views are exact opposites.
>
> Then again, some argue that an emptied vision of nothingness arising through a combination of certain conditions – e.g., being situated in a dark room, adopting a specific bodily posture of meditation, and stopping all forms of thought – is the actual *dharmakāya*. It [*dharmakāya*] is also the 'emptiness endowed with all aspects,' hence, even ordinary people can experience a direct recognition of *dharmakāya*. Yet others hold that such experience does not constitute the totality of a vision of *dharmakāya* but only a partial glimpse of it. Some contend that this cannot be understood even as experiencing a partial glimpse of *dharmakāya*; rather, it represents an experience of mere vacuity or emptiness. Moreover, [they argue that] among emptinesses this is not the negative intrinsic emptiness of Candrakīrti and Haribhadra and so on but is instead the 'extrinsic emptiness' (*gzhan stong*) accepted by Asaṅga, the master of great Madhyamaka.[96] Some assert, however, that it is indeed intrinsic emptiness. These two views are directly opposite. Some maintain that it is not even a genuine emptiness but only a form or reflection of emptiness. Therefore, [according to them] it is not *dharmakāya* but a manifestation of it, just as the perception of smoke is indicative of the presence of fire.

Tsongkhapa's principal concern here is actually the soteriological implications of these views. In his view, not only do these positions lead to a kind of soteriological dead-end, but more importantly, when combined with the anti-rationalist tendencies of certain Tibetan interpretations of Vajrayāna, their ramifications in the realm of ethics are deeply disturbing. Tsongkhapa saw the moral decline, or moral laxity to be more precise, that seemed to be widespread during some particular periods in Tibetan history as being a natural consequence of many of the philosophical views prevalent in those periods. In his view, the various strands of the

positions against which he was arguing are clearly, and dangerously, a residual legacy from the Chinese master Hva-shang Mohoyen, whose tenets were, according to Tsongkhapa, comprehensively demonstrated as unsound by the Indian master Kamalaśīla. In fact, Tsongkhapa often uses the term 'Hva-shang's view' as a typological label when criticising a host of theories. For example, when criticising one such position in his *Queries*, Tsongkhapa states that 'As far as I am concerned, I cannot see any difference between your style of meditation and that of Hva-hang's system!'[97] Note the tone of finality in Tsongkhapa's criticism.

A related but distinct concern was what Tsongkhapa saw as meditative quietism. This, he felt, results from an incorrect understanding of the nature of and the relationship between two principal elements in Buddhist meditative praxis, namely, tranquil abiding (*śamatha*) and special, or penetrative, insight (*vipaśyanā*). In its extreme form, meditative quietism is best illustrated by the system of Hva-shang Mohoyen and is the corollary of anti-rationalism in the realm of meditative practice. The problem here directly concerns the role of discursive thought in the soteriological process of the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Drawing heavily from the pivotal scripture *Saṃdhinirmocanasūtra*, and also from the three *Bhāvanākrama* of Kamalaśīla, Tsongkhapa argues extensively that discursive thought is as crucial in a spiritual aspirant's path to enlightenment as its counterpart, deep single-pointedness.[98] If mere quietude, no matter how sophisticated, constitutes the core of the process towards enlightenment, 'unknowing,' rather than 'knowing,' becomes the key to true awakening. Without discursive analysis no fresh insights can be gained nor can any awareness of the ultimate nature of reality arise within the individual. Tsongkhapa sees no qualitative difference between such a form of quietude and the naturally occurring states of non-mentation (*sems mi 'phro ba*) such as deep sleep, fainting, or stupor.[99]

Tsongkhapa's solution to this problem was to re-emphasise the need for a healthy balance between the important Buddhist trio: study (*thos pa*), discursive thinking (*bsam pa*), and meditation (*sgom pa*). According to him the problem arises from the following situation. Many of those who are inclined towards a life of single-pointed meditative practice perceive study and discursive thinking to be an obstacle on the path to enlightenment. On the other hand, those with scholarly interests seem to be lacking in serious

motivation to apply their intellectual understanding to meditative practice; instead, they appear to be more keen to expand their scholarly reputations.[100] In other words, one group fails to appreciate fully the significance of learning while the other neglects the crucially important element of internalizing philosophical knowledge through meditative praxis.

Underlying the above issues is the crucial question of the exact nature of the relationship between the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the ultimate standpoint of Vajrayāna Buddhism. Tsongkhapa shared the view of many of his Tibetan predecessors that tantra represents the pinnacle of spiritual awakening in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This view was also held by many great Tibetan masters like Marpa Lotsawa, Sakya Paṇḍita, Butön, and of course many of the Kadam teachers including the Indian master Atīśa himself. However, what seriously concerned Tsongkhapa were the widespread misconceptions associated with tantra, which he believed to be pervasive in Tibet during his time. Among these was the widespread denigration – in some cases leading to eventual negation – of ethics on the grounds that tantra proposes a standpoint that is non-judgemental and beyond all forms of dichotomy and polarities. Ethics was perceived to be relevant only to those of weak mind, whereas a true spiritual aspirant whose mind was receptive to the mysteries of tantra could and should transcend the strictures of conventional morality. Such attitudes, according to Tsongkhapa, led to a climate of moral decline in ancient Tibet. From the above, we can surmise that Tsongkhapa saw an intimate link between epistemological scepticism, philosophical nihilism, and moral relativism. Not only does one view naturally lead to another, but one could almost say that they are all different aspects of the same coin.

To summarise, in developing his philosophy of the middle way, Tsongkhapa can be seen as 're-claiming' Nāgārjuna in Tibet through a close reading of Candrakīrti. This does not by any means signify that Tsongkhapa's thought consists of a mere re-presentation of Candrakīrti. As is clear from his works, many of Tsongkhapa's substantive contributions are genuinely original by any intellectual standard. However, given Tsongkhapa's especially close identification with Candrakīrti's works, it does seem to be the case that if Candrakīrti's reading of Nāgārjuna is flawed, serious doubts can also be raised against Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Madhyamaka philosophy. Perhaps Tsongkhapa's greatest

contribution to Madhyamaka thought lies in the depth and breadth of his examination of the philosophical implications of the central Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness in key areas of philosophy and soteriology. For example, Tsongkhapa lists what he sees as the 'eight distinctive features of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka,' all of which he takes to be direct consequences of the central Prāsaṅgika thesis, namely, the rejection of intrinsic existence (*svabhāvasiddhi*). In identifying these features, Tsongkhapa writes,

> In interpreting the treatise of Ārya [Nāgārjuna] there exists a unique approach whereby the text can be read in such a way that all transactions can be maintained although not even an atom exists by means of self-defining characteristics. Because of this, this system [Prāsaṅgika] has many flawless tenets that distinguish it from the other interpreters [of Nāgārjuna].
>
> 'What are they?'
>
> [Answer:] For the time being, I shall state the principal ones:
> (i) the rejection of a foundational consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) separate from the six classes of consciousness;
> (ii) a unique system of refuting the [concept of] a self-cognizing, apperceptive faculty of consciousness (*sva-saṃvedanā*);
> (iii) the rejection of the autonomous syllogism as a means of generating insight into the nature of reality, thus, three negative tenets;
> (iv) the acceptance of the reality of external objects as much as the reality of [the world of] consciousness;
> (v) the assertion that *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s cognize the absence of intrinsic existence of phenomena;
> (vi) the assertion that grasping at the self-existence of phenomena is an afflictive obstruction;
> (vii) the position that the cessation [of empirical things] is a conditioned phenomenon; and thus,
> (viii) a unique presentation of the nature of the three [tenses of] time.[101]

This list should not be confused with another list of eight attributed to Tsongkhapa known as the 'eight difficult points of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*' as found in Gyaltsap's notes.[102] In this second list of eight, (vii) and (viii) are omitted and in their place are included: the rejection of the notion of 'self-defining characteristics,'

and a unique way of understanding the Buddha's perception of the relative world of multiplicity.[103]

Subsequent Tibetan Mādhyamikas have attacked Tsongkhapa for suggesting that the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka has unique tenets of its own, especially such constructive views as the acceptance of the cessation of empirical things as a conditioned phenomenon. For example, Gorampa argues that an acceptance of such a conditioned phenomenon is a Vaiśeṣika tenet and, thus, the view of someone outside the fold of the Buddhist schools.[104] Furthermore, he rejects Tsongkhapa's claim that the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka does not accept the existence of a foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and a self-cognizing, apperceptive faculty (*svasaṃvedanā*).[105] The later Nyingma thinker Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso (1846–1912) too has argued that the Prāsaṅgika need not reject the conventional existence of both a foundational consciousness and a reflexive awareness.[106] In contrast, Taktsang agrees with Tsongkhapa that Prāsaṅgikas do not accept a self-cognizing faculty, but he maintains that Candrakīrti does not negate a foundational consciousness.[107] Regardless of who is right in these debates, Tsongkhapa's reinterpretation of the philosophy of emptiness has clearly exerted a powerful and lasting impact on the understanding of Nāgārjuna's thought in Tibet. Perhaps, more importantly, we can see in Tsongkhapa's writings a serious attempt to draw out many of the philosophical and soteriological implications of the central Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka thesis, namely, the rejection of intrinsic existence.

CHAPTER TWO

Delineating the Parameters of Madhyamaka Reasoning[1]

Earlier, we observed that one of the key concerns underlying Tsongkhapa's thought was the development of a systematic reading of the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness in such a way that it could no longer be regarded as nihilistic. As I see it, there are two aspects to this central project. The first is primarily a negative approach whereby Tsongkhapa endeavours through analysis to delineate the parameters of Madhyamaka reasoning in such a way that Madhyamaka dialectics cannot be seen to negate the objects of everyday experience and, more importantly, ethics and religious activity. In Tsongkhapa's own language, the task here is to 'correctly identify the object of negation' so that one does not fall into the extremes of under-negation or over-negation. The second aspect of Tsongkhapa's project entails developing a systematic theory of reality in the aftermath of an absolute rejection of intrinsic existence. This, of course, is an affirmative approach that will be dealt with in a later chapter.

In this chapter, we will examine both Tsongkhapa's analysis of Madhyamaka logic as well as his efforts to delineate the boundaries of negation in Madhyamaka reasoning. In this regard, Tsongkhapa's foremost challenge was perhaps to demonstrate coherently that applying the four-cornered argument (*catuṣkoṭi*)[2] of Madhyamaka logical analysis does not serve to destroy the validity of our everyday world of experience. And judging by the way in which Tsongkhapa approached this challenge, the following elements appear to be key to his strategy in delineating the parameters of negation:

(1) distinguishing between the domains of conventional and ultimate discourses;
(2) distinguishing between the two senses of 'ultimate' in the context of Madhyamaka dialectics;
(3) identifying the objection of negation prior to the application of Madhyamaka dialectics;
(4) distinguishing between that which is 'negated' and that which is 'not found'; and
(5) understanding correctly the logical form of the negation involved in these dialectics.

The viability and coherence of Tsongkhapa's interpretation of Madhyamaka dialectics depend, to a large degree, on the extent of his success in making a case for these approaches. If we can show that his enterprise has been successful – or at least rationally tenable – this may provide all Mādhyamikas with a better defence against the perpetual charge that theirs is a nihilistic view.

Tsongkhapa's reading of the four-cornered argument in Madhyamaka reasoning

A typical formulation of the Madhyamaka four-cornered argument, or *tetralemma* as it is known in modern Buddhist scholarship, can be presented as follows. A supposed entity, or thing, possessing 'intrinsic nature' (*svabhāva*) cannot be said to exist as any of the following four possibilities:

(1) as existent
(2) as non-existent
(3) as both existent and non-existent
(4) as neither existent nor non-existent

In other words, all of the above four possibilities are rejected. Like any thoroughgoing Mādhyamika philosopher, Tsongkhapa gives serious consideration to the precise formulation of this argument. To apply the term 'dialectic' to this pattern of argument, as some noted modern Mādhyamika scholars have done, is reasonable.[3] Certainly, Tsongkhapa does not agree with those who claim that the use of the tetralemma in Madhyamaka implies a denial of fundamental logical principles such as the law of the excluded middle and the principle of contradiction. He does not believe that the tetralemma argument suggests an ontological standpoint that

somehow transcends these fundamental rules of logic. Thus, in no way does Tsongkhapa share the views of those who assert that the Madhyamaka dialectic aims to lead us to an 'awakening' wherein we perceive the 'absolute' (considered to be indeterminate, indivisible, and ineffable) through a kind of higher faculty. This higher faculty (or intuition), according to this view, is awakened within us by a 'paralysis of reason' that is supposedly brought on by the Madhyamaka dialectic itself.[4] Tsongkhapa reads the Madhyamaka dialectic as arguing against an essentialist ontology, namely, an ontology that entails a belief in intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*).

According to Tsongkhapa there is nothing to indicate that the tetralemma argument is either open to a charge of logical inconsistency, or that there is anything paradoxical in how it is used in Madhyamaka analysis. If there seems to be a paradox, it is only an illusory one that dissolves when one looks more closely at the structure of the argument. According to Tsongkhapa, that the dialectic is structured in the form of a tetralemma is a clear indication that logical principles, such as the law of the excluded middle and the law of contradiction, are at work here. For him, the strength of the argument derives from the fact that if any self-enclosed entity were to exist (note the subjunctive), as the essentialists[5] would like to assert, it would have to do so within the framework of the four possibilities suggested by the tetralemma argument. In other words, if an entity possessing a self-enclosed nature or intrinsic being existed, there would be only four conceivable possibilities. Moreover, the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*) is the best pattern of argument whereby the central thesis – intrinsic existence – can be negated, and this is accomplished by means of negating those four possibilities. However, this raises a crucial question: why are all four lemmas necessary when the negation of the first lemma seems to serve the argument's purpose, that is, the total negation of intrinsic existence? In other words, what is the difference in scope between the negation of the first lemma and the total negation of intrinsic existence itself?

For Tsongkhapa, this point is critical. The four lemmas have to be not only logically exhaustive but also conceptually inclusive in order for the argument to prove fully effective.[6] To establish this, one must show a distinction between the scope of the negation of the first lemma and the conclusion of the entire argument. Tsongkhapa achieves this by making several important distinctions.

Crucial to our understanding of Tsongkhapa's reasoning here is an appreciation of the various meanings of the terms *dngos po/bhāva* (entity, actuality, or existence) and *dngos med/abhāva* (non-entity, non-actuality, or non-existence). On this critical point, Tsongkhapa writes the following general observation in *LTC*:

> One might wonder thus: 'Given that in the Madhyamaka literature all four lemmas – that is, an entity or intrinsic nature is existent, [it is] non-existent, [it is] both, or [it is] neither – are negated, and since there is nothing that exists outside of these, isn't it the case that everything is negated by reason?'
>
> [Response:] As explained earlier, here too there are two distinct meanings of the term *bhāva* (entity, or being). In that it refers to an intrinsically existing entity, *bhāva* must be negated at whichever of the two [the conventional and the ultimate] levels of reality it is being posited. However, in the sense of an actuality, i.e., a functional thing or event, *bhāva* cannot be denied at the level of conventional truth. Similarly, in the case of *abhāva* (non-being), too, if non-composite phenomena such as space are asserted to be intrinsically established as non-being, then *abhāva* too must be negated. Also, both the existence and non-existence of such *bhāva* (being) must be negated, and so too must the intrinsic reality of their opposites. It is in this way that all types of negation involving the tetralemma should be understood.[7]

Tsongkhapa also treats the Madhyamaka argument known as 'diamond splinters' (*rdo rje gzegs ma*) in a similar manner. This form of Madhyamaka analysis deconstructs the principle of causality. In its classical formulation in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the argument is stated in the following manner:

> Never, anywhere, does anything arise:
> Not from itself, nor from another,
> Not from both, nor without any cause.[8]

If anything arises from anything in an essential way, it must do so in one of the above four possible ways. This means that things must come into being either from themselves, from an intrinsically real other, in some sense from both self and other, or from no cause at all. This is because these four modes exhaust all the conceptual possibilities of a thing coming into being in an essential way.

However, negating all four leaves intact the actual production itself, which is operational within the framework of mere conditionality. For according to Tsongkhapa, within the framework of our everyday world of conventional reality, we simply accept that effects come into being due to their corresponding causes and conditions. The statement that sprouts arise from their seeds implies no metaphysical claim about causality over and above what is asserted linguistically. The conventions of the world do not posit the notion of causality on the basis of an analysis determining whether something comes into being from a cause that is identical, or different, or from a cause that is a combination of the two, or from a cause that is neither identical nor different from the effect. Such metaphysical considerations arise only as a result of philosophical reflections. Tsongkhapa makes the following point in *LTC*:

> If the origination [of things] is accepted at the ultimate level, one must also maintain that it can withstand an analysis pertaining to its true mode of being. In such a case, the concept of origination arises through an analysis determining whether the effect comes into being from itself or from another, or from one of the four possibilities; one must then accept the relevance of the tetralemma reasoning. However, by simply accepting [the empirical fact] that this and that effect come into being due to this cause and that condition, one does not necessarily accept intrinsically real causation. Since this is not accepted, how can one analyse from the ultimate standpoint whether it comes into being from itself, or another, and so on. Hence, there is no need to admit that it [origination] *can* withstand critical analysis.[9]

In Tsongkhapa's treatment of the Madhyamaka dialectic we can see the overwhelming influence of a critical distinction that he makes between two types of analysis and their differing domains of application. To appropriate a well-known Anglo-American philosophical term, Tsongkhapa brings an 'analytic' dimension to his reading of the Madhyamaka's *catuṣkoṭi* argument. With great consistency, he brings to his reading a methodological principle that delineates the domains of two distinct perspectives: 'analysis from the ultimate standpoint' (*don dam dpyod byed*) and 'conventional analysis' (*kun rdzob dpyod byed*).[10] Clearly, this distinction has profound ramifications.

Distinguishing between the domains of conventional and ultimate discourses

Let us first examine how and on what grounds Tsongkhapa draws the above distinction. This will then enable us to deal with the question of its various logical and philosophical implications. In *GR* Tsongkhapa alludes to a story from Buddhapālita's commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.[11] The story involves a dispute between two persons regarding the correct identity of a figure depicted in a mural. One claims that the deity holding a sceptre in his right hand is Indra while the other argues that it is Viṣṇu. As they cannot resolve the dispute themselves, they approach a third person to arbitrate. However, the arbitrator settles the dispute in the most unlikely manner. He concludes that since the object in question is a mere drawing, it is neither Indra nor Viṣṇu and so none of the parties is right! Buddhapālita states that it is actually the arbitrator himself who is in the wrong. The moral of the story is this: By simply stating that the identity of the subject in dispute is a mere drawing (hence, neither Indra nor Viṣṇu in person), the arbitrator has totally missed the point. That it is a drawing is not in question; it is an assumption common to both the disputing parties. In question is the identity of the figure represented in the picture. So in some sense, the arbitrator has committed an error – he has stepped outside the domain of their relevant discussion by conflating two distinct perspectives. Therefore, his statement that neither of the parties is correct simply has no place within the domain of the current discourse. Consequently, the question of whether the verdict he has given is true or false simply does not arise.[12]

Just as in the story, Tsongkhapa distinguishes between two distinct domains of discourse, namely, that which pertains to the reality of our everyday world of convention, and that which pertains to the ultimate ontological status of things and events. Accordingly, Tsongkhapa conceives of two distinct categories of discourse and analysis that correspond to these two domains.[13] This immediately raises a crucial question: 'By what criteria does Tsongkhapa delineate the demarcations of the two perspectives?' In other words, how does he define 'analysis from the ultimate perspective' and 'conventional analysis'? On the surface, it would seem that this distinction is nothing but a different way of describing the Madhyamaka theory of two truths (*satyadvaya*).

On closer examination, however, we find that the issue is far more complex and demands its own independent treatment.

The above distinction between the scope of the two analyses is already fully developed in *LTC*. Tsongkhapa writes:

> Although the objects of conventional reality, such as form, sound, and so on, exist, they can never be established through a reasoning process that examines whether or not they possess intrinsic nature. Our master [Candrakīrti] has repeatedly stated that they [form, sound, and so on] are not susceptible to [critical] analysis ... If the reasoning that determines whether or not intrinsic beings exist *can* negate them [the objects of the conventional world], one can say that they are susceptible to analysis. However, this [point] is categorically rejected in the writings of this master [Candrakīrti].[14]

So if, as Tsongkhapa claims, the objects of our everyday world are not open to critical analysis in the sense that they can be neither *affirmed* nor *negated* by an analysis that seeks the ultimate ontological status of things, what forms of analysis and discourse *are* appropriate to dealing with the everyday world? Tsongkhapa devotes a large section in *LN* to distinguishing between ultimate and conventional forms of discourse. He writes:

> If this is so [that objects of the everyday world cannot be subjected to ultimate analysis], as there are many questions involving analysis [operative within the everyday world] such as whether one is coming or not, whether something has grown or not, can one not respond to these questions in the positive?
>
> [Answer:] This way of probing is very different from the mode of analysis defined earlier [i.e., ultimate analysis]. Questions of this kind [e.g., going and coming, etc.] do not operate from a premise whereof, not being satisfied with [mere] conventions of 'goer' and 'comer' and the acts of 'going' and 'coming,' one seeks intrinsically real referents to propositions. For these questions operate only at the level of everyday discourse. Therefore, why should there be any contradictions to accepting such mode of analysis.[15]

Similarly in *RG*, when delineating the differing scopes of the two analyses according to the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka school, Tsongkhapa first makes the following observation:

> There is not the slightest difference between the following two statements, 'Dharmadatta sees a form' and 'a substantially real Dharmadatta sees a form,' insofar as nothing substantial can be found as the referent of the subjective terms when you search for it. However, if we deny the first seeing, we go against conventional knowledge. In contrast, the second [kind of] seeing is something that can be negated by valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Therefore, the two are utterly different in terms of whether or not each exists on the conventional level. The reason for this is that substantial reality is such that if it exists, it must be found when sought through analysis, and when it cannot be found [thus], one can conclude that it is negated by reasoning. Whereas in the case of 'mere existence,' there is no need for it to be findable when sought analytically, and its non-findability through analysis cannot be taken as [a proof of] it being negated [by reasoning].[16]

The point being made here is this. Although the above two statements – 'Dharmadatta sees a form' and 'a substantially real Dharmadatta sees a form' – share many common features, they differ in a philosophically significant way. The first is a statement made only within the framework of an ordinary use of language while the second is clearly making an essentialist metaphysical assertion. This difference in the respective scopes of the two statements leaves the second, not the first, open to philosophical objections. For example, in *LTC* Tsongkhapa states that because he does not accept such events as origination (*skye ba*), cessation (*dgag pa*), and so on as being capable of withstanding ultimate analysis, he cannot be criticised for being committed to any notion of true being or intrinsically real entities.[17] In other words, Tsongkhapa is clearly distinguishing between essentialist metaphysical concepts of causality on the one hand, and causal processes such as origination as understood in everyday usage on the other. Tsongkhapa argues that much of the philosophical incoherence as well as the problems of nihilism that were thought to be endemic in Tibet in his time resulted from mistakenly equating the scopes of these two perspectives.[18] In contemporary terminology, we can say that Tsongkhapa is engaged here in an attempt to philosophically define the scope of reason in relation to our understanding of the nature of existence. Following the general

lineage of the Madhyamaka philosophico-soteriological approach, Tsongkhapa aims to destroy every single metaphysical basis that might otherwise lead to hypostatization. Nevertheless, Tsongkhapa is also keen to maintain a meaningful level of reality in relation to the everyday world of cause and effects. He regards a clear demarcation of the scope of Madhyamaka dialectics as essential to this purpose. Moreover, a coherent analytic distinction between the respective domains of the ultimate and conventional perspectives is a crucial element of this strategy.

So what exactly is an ultimate analysis? Tsongkhapa gives a general yet succinct definition of 'analysis pertaining to the ultimate' in *LTC*. He states that any form of reasoning that examines in the following manner – determining whether all things and events such as form and so on possess a real mode of being or not (*bden par yod dam med*), or whether they come into being by means of their intrinsic being (*rang gi ngo bo'i sgo nas grub bam ma grub*) or not – is an analysis pertaining to the ultimate, or absolute, status of the objects in question. Such types of reasoning can also be called 'analysis of the final status.'[19]

Tsongkhapa does not claim that this distinction is his own original work. He sees Candrakīrti as having clearly made this point. Tsongkhapa specifically quotes the following passage from Candrakīrti's *Yogacaryācatuḥśatakaṭīkā*:

> Our analysis focuses only on those who search for the intrinsically real referent. What we are refuting here is that things [and events] are established by means of their own-being. We do not [however] negate [the existence of] eyes and so on, which are [causally] conditioned and are dependently originated in that they are the fruits of *karma*.[20]

For Tsongkhapa, the crucial expression in this quote is what Candrakīrti calls the 'search for the intrinsically real referent' (*don rang bzhin 'tshol ba*). Tsongkhapa identifies several other similar important expressions in Candrakīrti's works that in his view carry the same sense. He argues that Candrakīrti uses interchangeable expressions such as 'thorough analysis' (*rnam par dpyad pa*), as in the statement, 'It does not exist when sought by means of a thorough analysis,' 'searching for the intrinsically real referent' (*don rang bzhin 'tshol ba*), as in, 'It is not found when one searches for the intrinsically real referent,' and 'on the ultimate level,' as in, 'There is nothing to attain on the ultimate

level.'[21] Regardless of whether or not Candrakīrti was conscious of the logical distinction between the domains of the two perspectives, it is clear that the way in which Tsongkhapa understood this distinction and used it as a fundamental methodological principle is unique. In Tsongkhapa's view the considerations concerning the different scopes of the two types of analysis are, in general terms, common to both the Svātantrika school of Madhyamaka and Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika school as well. Tsongkhapa maintains that both Madhyamaka sub-schools share the same basic premise that the conventional world cannot be subjected to ultimate analysis. Where the two sub-schools differ is on the question of what exactly constitutes this ultimate analysis.[22] In other words, Tsongkhapa is asserting that anyone who claims to follow the lineage of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka must necessarily accept some form of analytic distinction between the two domains of discourse, which roughly correspond to the two levels of reality – namely, the ultimate (*paramārtha*) and the conventional (*saṃvṛti*).

Two senses of 'ultimate' in the Madhyamaka dialectic

Within the context of the way in which Mādhyamikas express the notion that things and events are devoid of existence and identity on an ultimate level – that is, their assertion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as the ultimate nature of things – there are, according to Tsongkhapa, two subtly different ways in which the term 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*) is used. These two connotations of 'ultimate' are, additionally, closely related to the distinction between two forms of discourse, ultimate and conventional. First and foremost, in the context of Madhyamaka ontology (or its negation), the term 'ultimate' is used in the sense that all things and events are devoid of any absolute, or ultimate, existence or identity.[23] Here, 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*) is synonymous with 'substantially real mode of being' as in the phrase 'existent with a substantially real mode of being' (*bden par grub pa*), and with 'thorough' or 'perfect' as in 'existing with a thoroughly or perfectly definable nature' (*yang dag par grub pa*). In its second usage, 'ultimate' is juxtaposed with 'relative' (*saṃvṛti*) in the pan-Mahāyāna doctrine of the two truths. In this latter context, 'ultimate' refers to the ultimate nature of all things and events as opposed to their relative (that is, empirical and conventional) nature. Although these two senses of

ultimate (*paramārtha*) overlap, each has a distinct meaning. Nothing can be said to be real in the first sense – ultimately, or absolutely, real – because all phenomena – i.e., things, events, even the emptiness of intrinsic existence itself – are devoid of ultimate existence and identity. However, emptiness (*śūnyatā*) can be said to be 'real' in the second sense of ultimate and can, therefore, be said to be 'true' (*bden pa*), as it is the final nature of all things and events, the way things really are. This is because only emptiness (*śūnyatā*) can be found to remain at the end of an analysis pertaining to the ultimate status of things and events. This does not mean that emptiness itself can withstand ultimate analysis in Tsongkhapa's view, for nothing can withstand such probing. When subjected to such deconstructive analysis, emptiness too is found to be empty. Hence, the emptiness of emptiness.[24]

This distinction between two connotations of the term 'ultimate' allows Tsongkhapa to make seemingly paradoxical statements like 'emptiness is the ultimate reality but it is not ultimately real,' 'it is true but not truly established,' 'it is the intrinsic nature [of all things] but does not exist intrinsically' and so on. For example, in *GR*, Tsongkhapa writes:

> If this [distinction between the two senses of the term 'ultimate'] is ascertained well, one will understand the meanings that explain why there is no contradiction between [maintaining] that nothing exists by means of its own nature and that nothing exists from the ultimate perspective, while holding that 'ultimate nature' exists and that it *is* the 'mode of being [of things]' and the ultimate object.[25]

Although it is quite customary for modern scholars on Mahāyāna Buddhism to translate the Sanskrit word *paramārtha* as 'absolute' within the context of the Madhyamaka theory of the two truths, my view is that this translation should not be accepted as unproblematic. Following Tsongkhapa, there seem to be adequate grounds to make a case for distinguishing between *paramārtha* as 'absolute' and *paramārtha* as 'ultimate.' The interpretation of *paramārtha* as 'absolute' is totally rejected in the Madhyamaka dialectic, even in relation to emptiness. However, the interpretation of *paramārtha* as 'ultimate' is acceptable as that which is in contraposition to the relative, veiled truth (*saṃvṛti*) constituted by our everyday world of causes and effects. Tsongkhapa writes:

> Therefore, it cannot be the case that the ultimate meaning, the nature of things, their suchness and mode of being [of all phenomena] do not exist. Even if they exist, they do not do so as absolutes or as [their own] real mode of being. To suggest otherwise is to demonstrate a total lack of familiarity with the modes of critical analysis from the ultimate standpoint.[26]

Tsongkhapa concludes the above discussion by stating that it is because they do not appreciate this subtle distinction, namely, the difference between the ultimate and the absolute, that some (e.g., Ngok Loden Sherap) have maintained that ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*) is unknowable, while others (such as the Jonangpas) have asserted that it is absolute.[27] In brief, Tsongkhapa is saying that nothing, not even emptiness, can be said to exist from an absolute standpoint, while at the same time something, i.e., emptiness, can be said to be the ultimate nature. In other words, nothing exists 'ultimately' (*don dam par*) although something can be said to be 'the ultimate' (*don dam pa*). It is interesting to note here that so much philosophical significance hangs on what seems to be a peculiar linguistic or grammatical form. Tsongkhapa implies that any particular usage of the term 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*) in this peculiar grammatical case entails ontological claims. The grammatical case in point is what is known in Tibetan as *de nyid*, a unique case of prepositional usage that is employed almost exclusively in reference to the notion of identity. This usage could be perhaps best compared to the adverbial case in English. Phrases such as *don dam par grub* (ultimately existing), *yang dag par grub* (existing by means of thoroughly definable nature), *bden par yod* (truly existing), *gshis lugs su grub* (established by means of its own mode of being), *rang dbang du grub* (independently existing), *rdzas su yod* (substantially existing), and *tshugs thub tu yod* (existing by means of autonomous being) are cases of this usage.[28] Again, Tsongkhapa's way of defining the meaning of 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*) in the context of Madhyamaka dialectics, based on distinguishing between the two different senses of the term, seems to have contributed towards greater clarity in Madhyamaka reasoning. It enables us to have a clearer appreciation of what exactly is being negated in the Madhyamaka assertion that things and events do not exist from the 'ultimate' standpoint. This, then, takes us to the next element.

Identifying the object of negation

Another integral part of Tsongkhapa's philosophical strategy for delineating the 'correct' domain of reasoning is what he calls the '[proper] identification of the object of negation.'[29] Aware that everyone who professes to be a Mādhyamika is familiar with the premise that all things and events lack an ultimate ontological status, Tsongkhapa did not believe, however, that all Mādhyamikas understand clearly what exactly is meant by the absence of an ultimate mode of being. Moreover, in Tsongkhapa's view, confusion about this can have grave consequences. Going too far in one's negation can result in a position that denigrates the everyday world of valid experience, thus bringing one closer to the abyss of nihilism. On the other hand, if the net of what is to be negated is cast over too confined an area, one may let certain residues of reification – that is, of that elusive intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*) – slip through, thus leading more towards the position of absolutism. Therefore, what is required, according to Tsongkhapa, is to skilfully tread a fine line between the two extremes of under-negation and over-negation.[30] Tsongkhapa argues that it is crucial to have a clear conception of what is to be negated.[31] Without this, he suggests that statements like 'nothing exists in an absolute sense' and 'if things and events are still claimed to exist in such a manner, such and such objections can be raised' and so on, remain only grand words with no real effect.[32]

What exactly does it mean to identify correctly the object of negation? Is it an analytic distinction based on a correct understanding of a definition, or is it a practical distinction that each Mādhyamika has to make drawing from his or her own personal experience? Does Tsongkhapa consider a correct identification of the object of negation to be a prerequisite of the Madhyamaka dialectic? If so, for whom and for what purpose? Is it a prerequisite for a Mādhyamika who is arguing against the metaphysical postulates of the essentialist schools? Or, is it a requirement for a Mādhyamika practitioner seeking insight into the emptiness of intrinsic existence?

At first glance, it would appear that for Tsongkhapa this correct identification means nothing more than developing a clear understanding of the meaning of the term 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*) in the context of the Madhyamaka premise that all things and events lack ultimate ontological status. This is evident from the various treatments he gives to an important passage from *Tarkajvālā* where

Bhāvaviveka (known also by his short name Bhāvya) enumerates three different senses of 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*). According to Bhāvya, emptiness is the 'ultimate meaning' (*paramārtha*) because it is both 'supreme' and 'meaning.' It is also the 'ultimate object' (*paramārtha*) because it is the object of supreme gnosis, namely, the nonconceptual awareness of an *ārya* being. And emptiness can also be said to be 'ultimate' in that it is the object of an awareness that is in accord with the cognition of the supreme object.[33] Of these three, Tsongkhapa asserts that it is the third sense of 'ultimate' that is directly relevant in the context of the Madhyamaka refutation of essentialist ontology.[34] He substantiates this point further by quoting from *Madhyamakāloka* in which Kamalaśīla states that when it is said that nothing comes into being ultimately, we should understand this to mean that their coming into being is not affirmed by a supreme cognition.[35] Tsongkhapa concludes by observing that when Mādhyamikas contend that things and events do not exist on the absolute level, what they wish to reject is that things and events *can* be found to exist ultimately when they are sought through an analysis that investigates their ultimate nature. Once again this takes us back to the critical distinction we drew earlier between the ultimate and conventional perspectives and their corresponding domains of discourse.

But is this all there is, or is there more to Tsongkhapa's insistence on correctly identifying the object of negation? Clearly, there is more. The interpretation in the above argument of the use of the all-important ontological term 'ultimately' in Madhyamaka is too narrow, not sufficiently comprehensive. Tsongkhapa's insistence on a correct identification of the object of negation must not only apply to the process of countering other philosophical positions – essentialist ontology, for example – but must also apply to how we perceive things on a normal daily basis. In other words, a Mādhyamika proponent must clearly understand how even our normal, naive, and pre-philosophical ways of perceiving the world are effected by a belief in some kind of intrinsic existence of things and events. Without such an understanding, the Madhyamaka emptiness of intrinsic existence becomes merely a deconstructive device to rebut other philosophical viewpoints.

It is interesting to note that although Tsongkhapa seems clear from an early stage that the principal objects of negation in the Madhyamaka dialectic are our innate apprehension[36] of self-existence and their contents, it is not, however, until the writing of

GR that he explicitly relates this point to the hermeneutic of understanding the all-important qualifier 'ultimately' in the context of the Madhyamaka refutation of essentialist ontology. In *LTC* Tsongkhapa states that an understanding of the significance of the qualifying term 'ultimately' in the Madhyamaka discourse on emptiness is indispensable. He rejects the suggestion that only the Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas, not the Prāsaṅgikas, use this qualification. However, when it comes to defining the meaning of the term, Tsongkhapa relates it to Bhāvya's way of distinguishing among the three senses of ultimacy (*paramārtha*).[37] We find a similar approach in *LN* as well.

In contrast, in *GR* Tsongkhapa develops a convincing case to distinguish between two senses of 'ultimate' (*don dam*) as it is used as a qualifying term in the Madhyamaka refutation of intrinsic existence. Tsongkhapa writes:

> It is necessary to understand that there are two senses to the term 'ultimate' when the qualifier 'ultimately' is applied in relation to the object of negation. The first is the case where critical insights into emptiness, such as those derived from hearing, reflection, and meditation, are known as the ultimate [perspective]. In this sense, to say 'things do not exist ultimately' is to say that they cannot be found by such a cognition. Second, there is ultimate in the sense of something that is said to possess an objective mode of being that is not posited in dependence upon the mind. Of these two senses of ultimate, not only does the first ultimate exist, but also something can be said to exist from its perspective. [In contrast] both the second ultimate and its object *cannot* exist. Therefore, if anything exists from the perspective of the second ultimate, it must also exist from the perspective of the first ultimate. However, apprehension of the first ultimate is not innate, for this requires the [apprehension of the] second kind of ultimate.[38]

Tsongkhapa makes this critical observation in *GR* in the section on identifying the object of negation according to the Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas. This, however, is not a cause of concern, for Tsongkhapa makes the following point:

> Insofar as it is necessary to understand that there are two senses to the qualifying term 'ultimately,' this is also true in

> the case here [Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka]. Although the Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas maintain that the three, such as 'substantially real existence' and so on, are untenable within the sphere of objects of knowledge, they accept on the conventional level the existence of the three, such as 'existing by means of intrinsic being' and so on.[39]

There isn't much in the Indian Madhyamaka literature to substantiate by means of direct citations Tsongkhapa's point regarding the importance of prior identification of the object of negation. Tsongkhapa quotes *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9:139[40] to make a general point about the critical importance of cultivating a clear conceptual understanding of the object of negation. But to the best of my knowledge, no commentator in India seems to have associated this verse with *identifying* the object of negation. Nor did any Tibetan commentators on Madhyamaka before Tsongkhapa. However, Tsongkhapa literally forces the texts, as it were, to say what he wishes them to state. In *GR* Tsongkhapa shows how a close reading of a passage from Kamalaśīla's *Madhyamakāloka* can reveal a clear identification of the object of negation that is being rejected by the Madhyamaka. He argues that when reversed, the passage that defines conventional existence gives us the criterion of its direct opposite, absolute existence.[41] If a Madhyamaka refutation of essentialist ontology is to lead to liberation, as Mādhyamikas of all shades appear to agree, it is essential that the object to be negated is one that is conceived by an innate faculty, an ignorance (*avidyā*) that is inherent in all beings and not just in those with philosophical views. After all, according to Buddhism, liberation (*nirvāṇa*) entails cutting off the root of unenlightened existence (*saṃsāra*), which is precisely this innate ignorance (*avidyā*). So Tsongkhapa seems to assert that not only is the prior correct identification of the object of negation crucial for the Mādhyamika philosopher, it is equally essential for the Mādhyamika spiritual aspirant as well.

What does it mean to say that someone must have a prior understanding of what is to be negated? Tsongkhapa gives the analogy of someone who is trying to ascertain the absence or presence of a certain person. For this, he argues, it is necessary to have some idea of who that person is in the first place.[42] Judging by this analogy, Tsongkhapa is asserting that a Mādhyamika must develop a clear sense of what is to be negated by the Madhyamaka

dialectic before the actual process of deconstruction has even begun. If this is true, this raises, in my view, some epistemological problems for Tsongkhapa. First, this implies that the Mādhyamika aspirant is able to coherently distinguish between 'existence only' (*yod tsam*) on the one hand, and 'intrinsic existence' (*rang bzhin gyis yod pa*) on the other. Not only that, he or she must be able to distinguish this within his or her own personal experience, i.e., how things and events appear to the naive worldview. The problem with this, however, is that such distinctions can be made, if at all, only in the aftermath of having cognized the absence of intrinsic existence (*niḥsvabhāva*) by true knowledge. Until then, existence and intrinsic existence remain completely indistinguishable so far as the perception of the average individual is concerned. They are, to use Tsongkhapa's own imagery, like a face and its reflection in a mirror. As far as visual perception is concerned, the face that you see in the mirror and its reflection are one and the same image. There is no separate image of the face apart from the reflection that appears in the mirror.[43] Tsongkhapa himself seems to be fully aware of this problem of circularity. In *LN*, Tsongkhapa states that until and unless the individual himself has [experientially] deconstructed intrinsic existence, no amount of verbal explanation given by a third person can help him clearly distinguish between existence only and intrinsic existence of things and events.[44]

Judging by Tsongkhapa's overall approach, we might expect that he would reconcile this seeming paradox by invoking a popular Tibetan epistemological distinction between cognition by true knowledge and intellectual understanding. In this view, prior to a cognition of emptiness, a Mādhyamika aspirant first develops an intellectual or conceptual understanding of the distinction between existence only and intrinsic existence. However, a *true cognition* of such a distinction arises only subsequent to the actual deconstruction of intrinsic existence. This response does seem to go a long way in resolving the epistemological problem, but only if one is prepared to accept the epistemological distinction between intellectual understanding and true cognition.[45] It is interesting to note that Tsongkhapa himself does not invoke this contrast between intellectual understanding and true cognition to deal with the problem of circularity. Perhaps, he did not think of it as a real problem.

That which is 'not found' and that which is 'negated'

Tsongkhapa acknowledges that the tetralemma argument has only a negative function: the process of rejecting all four possibilities of the 'four-cornered' argument illustrates the limits of any essentialist metaphysical description of reality. The primary function of the tetralemma is criticism, as it deftly moves from critiquing a thesis to critiquing its antithesis, leaving no room for even the slightest tendency towards reification. However, so far as the actuality of our everyday world is concerned, the tetralemma argument leaves it completely unscathed. The reality of this world need not be exhausted within any of the four ontological possibilities being negated in the Madhyamaka dialectic. It is only when one steps outside the bounds of conventional common sense and seeks a metaphysical grounding for the world that one becomes susceptible to the deconstructive power of the dialectic. Hence, from Tsongkhapa's point of view, there is nothing surprising in finding that even the reality of everyday objects like tables, chairs, and so on are found to be untenable when searched for through such critical analysis. This does not entail that they are in some profound sense negated by reasoning. Something can be negated by reasoning only if it falls within the scope of that particular analysis and is unable to withstand it. The following is a useful analogy. If there is a flowerpot in front of the speaker, it should be observable; when it cannot be seen, we can safely conclude that there is no such object in front of the speaker. In this context, there is a coincidence between not finding or not observing an object on the one hand, and finding its absence on the other. This is, however, not the case with, for instance, the presence of a ghost (supposing such things exist!) in front of the speaker. In the latter case, the non-observance of it simply cannot be taken as adequate grounds for its non-existence.

This distinction is clearly strongly influenced by Dharmakīrti's logic of inference. In his *Pramāṇavārttika*, Dharmakīrti draws a distinction between two types of negative inference. In the first instance, the negantum (*dgag bya'i chos*) is negated by means of asserting its non-observance or the non-observance of objects that are either causally or logically related to it. This type of negation is applicable only in instances where what is to be negated is generally perceptible. However, this does not apply to cases where the object of negation is, even in general terms, non-observable

(*mi snangs ba ma dmigs pa*). In the latter case, we can only infer the absence of its perception rather than the absence of the object of negation itself.[46] For Tsongkhapa, just as there is a world of difference between a *non-observance* of something and an *observance of its absence*, there is also a difference between that which is *not found* by reasoning and that which is *negated* by reasoning.[47] This distinction is critical if Tsongkhapa is to succeed in his task of delineating the scope of reason. Again, we can see that this relates to the critical distinction made earlier between the domains of ultimate analysis and conventional analysis.

It is clear that Tsongkhapa wants to develop a methodology that will allow for a coherent distinction between the absence of intrinsic existence of everyday objects of experience on the one hand, and what he perceives as unnecessary (and at worst, harmful) metaphysical postulates like *ātman*, primal substance (*prakṛti*), etc. on the other. Without the subtle distinctions that have been drawn between these two different perspectives, he argues, one will be forced to admit that there is no significant difference between them. For insofar as the ability or inability to withstand analysis is concerned, both categories are equal. There is also no difference between the two insofar as they are both objects of discursive thought. Thus, Tsongkhapa writes:

> Some lack a comprehensive and detailed critical understanding of the above points and negate ultimate existence by means of some partial [and ineffectual] reasoning. [They also] maintain that the reality of things and events, which exist on the conventional level, can be posited insofar as they are perceived so by some distorting consciousness, for to be an object of such [distorting] consciousness is the criterion of conventional existence. If one thinks thus, one cannot maintain the distinction between the following two propositions: 'Pain and pleasure are created by íśvara (a transcendent, supernatural being),' and 'Pain and pleasure are caused by negative and positive *karma*.' [For on this view], if one proposition is true, the other must also be true. Similarly, if the former is false, so must the latter be. This is because, when subjected to critical analysis as characterized earlier, even the latter [proposition] becomes untenable; and insofar as being the object of a distorting consciousness is concerned, even the former [proposition] can be said to be true.[48]

Tsongkhapa argues that those who maintain that the Prāsaṅgikas do not accept the existence of everyday objects even on the conventional level do so because of their failure to appreciate the subtle distinction between that which is 'not found through reasoning' and that which is 'negated by reasoning.' Furthermore, according to Tsongkhapa, they are ignorant of the critical distinction between the different domains of ultimate and conventional discourses. Such ignorance, according to Tsongkhapa, leads to a certain impoverishment in one's philosophical thinking that can compel one to make absurd statements such as 'the world exists only from the perspective of the other,' 'I have no views of my own,' and so on. This, according to Tsongkhapa, is certainly not the silence of the noble sage that the Madhyamaka dialectic should bring about; rather, it is the silence of an impoverished sceptical philosophy.

Earlier, I suggested that Tsongkhapa does not see the tetralemma itself as a form of paradox. Even if there appears to be some element of paradox in the classical formulation of the argument, Tsongkhapa has successfully resolved it with his penetrating distinctions among the various perspectives involved in the argument. The crucial question is whether or not, at the end of the negation of the four lemmas, we are still left dangling with a paradox, and if so, whether or not it is a paradox born of a *paralysis of reason* brought about by the Madhyamaka dialectic. Given Tsongkhapa's overall approach – that is, his clarity of vision, his thoroughgoing rationality, and most importantly, his refusal to seek the option of viewing the ultimate nature of reality in some indeterminate, absolute mode – the temptation is indeed great to answer in the negative. However, let us not hasten. A closer reading of Tsongkhapa reveals an interesting situation. It is certain that Tsongkhapa does not believe that the tetralemma leaves you in a state of indecision, or 'non-commitment', as some modern scholars have called it.[49] So far as the conclusion that all things and events are devoid of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity is concerned, there is nothing undecided or non-committal about it. A Mādhyamika's conviction is as certain as any belief could possibly be. The negation of such a reified ontology is absolute and final. Paradox, if it can be called this at all, arises only when one redirects one's perception to the everyday world of experience in the aftermath of the Madhyamaka dialectical process. At the core of one's perception of reality, or worldview, lies what could best be

described as a paradox – a sense of perplexity at a world constituted by interrelationships among entities that are not 'real.' This is paradoxical in that one is at a total loss (conceptually) to reconcile the world of appearance and its underlying reality (or unreality), its thoroughly empty nature.[50] Coming to terms with this, according to Tsongkhapa, is the greatest challenge for Madhyamaka philosophy. Tsongkhapa himself describes the experience as follows:

> O friends, [you who are] learned in the profound Middle Way treatises,
> Difficult though it is to posit
> Causality and dependence without 'intrinsic being';
> Still, it is wiser to rely on this [Prāsaṅgika] line of thought,
> Hailing it as the way of the Middle.[51]

A logical analysis of the forms of negation

We now come to the final element in our examination of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka dialectic. We have observed that Tsongkhapa acknowledges that the Madhyamaka dialectic functions only in the form of negation.[52] We have also seen that the negation of intrinsic existence in Madhyamaka is absolute and total. We must now look at Tsongkhapa's analysis of the various forms of negation so that we can assess how it relates to his soteriological concerns. In most of his substantial works on the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness, Tsongkhapa gives a separate treatment of the analysis of the principal forms of negation employed in Buddhist philosophy.[53] If a negation of intrinsic existence is not categorical and, therefore, not absolute, there will always be a tendency, no matter how slight and residual, towards reification. Moreover, reification, according to Tsongkhapa, always obstructs true liberation – it constricts our ability to relate to the world in an appropriate manner. In other words, it obscures our vision of reality and chains us to a vicious cycle of illusion and projections. Therefore, in order for negation to be thorough, it must be a 'non-implicative negation' (*prasajya*), namely, a negation that leaves no room for any affirmation or implication in its aftermath. This is in contrast to an 'implicative negation' (*paryudāsa*), which while negating one thing implies or affirms something else. Although these negations have a lot to do with what, in the wake

of John Searle's work,[54] may be called speech acts, the difference between them is essentially logical and semantic.

The following much-quoted verse from Nāgārjuna illustrates a typical case of a 'non-implicative' negation:

> Here, its existence is negated only,
> But its non-existence is not upheld.
> For when one says that it is not black,
> One doesn't assert that it is white![55]

To have a clearer understanding of Tsongkhapa's emphasis on the use of the non-implicative negation in Madhyamaka dialectics, let us look at some of the propositional forms used linguistically to express negation. A typical illustration of this form of negation that we find in Tsongkhapa's writing is the following proposition: 'Brahmins do not drink alcohol.' This is a simple negative statement. Of course, brahmins may drink water, or tea, or juice, or other beverages, but none of these, nor any other characteristics of brahmins, such as the fact that they don't eat meat and so forth, are implied in any way. It is a clear, precise, unambiguous statement whose purpose is simply to deny that brahmins drink alcohol. Compare this with the following statement: 'This fat man doesn't eat during the day.' This form of negation is called implicative for it involves more than a simple negation. In addition to denying that the man eats during the daytime, the statement implies that he eats at night. Tsongkhapa, citing a verse quoted in Avalokitavrata's commentary on Bhāvaviveka's *Prajñāpradīpa*,[56] lists the following four types of implicative negation:

(1) Affirmation by implication, e.g., 'The fat Devadatta does not eat during the day.'
(2) Negation and affirmation both effected explicitly by the same proposition, e.g., 'The absence of self exists.'
(3) Affirmation effected both explicitly and implicitly as well, e.g., 'The fat Devadatta doesn't eat during the day yet does not lose any weight.'
(4) Affirmation implied by context, e.g., 'This man is not a brahmin' in the context where the person is known to be either a brahmin or a royal.[57]

Interestingly, Tsongkhapa and many Tibetan Mādhyamikas do not seem to distinguish clearly between statements and their propositional contents when examining the nature of various forms of

negations. Often the discussion on forms of negation is conducted in terms of negative phenomena (*dgag pa*) versus positive phenomena (*sgrub pa*), as if these were objective characteristics of reality.[58] There could be several reasons for this. First, there is an ambiguity in the Tibetan language about the grammatical status of many verbs. Words like *dgag pa* (to negate) and *sgrub pa* (to posit) can be read, depending upon the context, both as nouns and as verbs. When read as nouns, *dgag pa* can be translated as 'negative phenomena' and *sgrub pa* as 'positive phenomena.' Another reason is perhaps that Tibetan thinkers, including Tsongkhapa, are generally more interested in the actual philosophical content of a theory than in the linguistic aspects. This might also explain why Tibetan philosophers, unlike their Indian counterparts, very rarely consider grammatical analysis to be crucial for philosophical examination.

Some modern interpreters of Madhyamaka thought have suggested that we read Nāgārjuna's refutation of all four lemmas of the four-cornered argument as illocutionary rather than as propositional.[59] The difference between these two forms of negation comes from the scope of the negative particle *not*. Take the following case: 'I do not say that there is an afterlife,' and 'there is no afterlife.'[60] Clearly, there is a difference between the two propositions. In the first sentence the negation applies only to the proposition, in that the statement does not claim that there is no afterlife. In contrast, in the second sentence even the propositional content – that is, the existence of an afterlife – is also denied. The problem with this reading is that it inevitably leads to an interpretation of Madhyamaka dialectics as purely deconstructive with no commitments of its own.[61] As we can see, Tsongkhapa's reading of the argument differs from this. For Tsongkhapa, Nāgārjuna's refutation of all four lemmas is absolute, which means in Searlian language that the negation involved in their refutation is propositional and not illocutionary. Furthermore, Tsongkhapa would agree with contemporary interpreters of Madhyamaka thought who would characterize negation in the Madhyamaka dialectic as ontological rather than linguistic.[62]

Tsongkhapa argues that just as the appreciation of the thoroughly negative, that is, non-implicative, character of emptiness is critical in that it removes all possibilities for reification, it is equally important not to confuse this negation with nihilism. He warns us not to get carried away by the frequent usage of terms like

'mere' (*tsam*), and its analogues such as 'only' (*gcig pu*), 'just' (*kho na*), and 'alone' (*'ba' zhig*).[63] What is being denied by all these terms of exclusion is the notion that something positive, perhaps a deeper reality, is being affirmed in the aftermath of negation. This is in direct contrast to those who think that the ultimate nature of reality according to Madhyamaka thought is some kind of an absolute – something along the lines of Leibnizian plenitude or Vedānta's Brahman – that serves in some way as the fundamental substratum of reality.[64] According to Tsongkhapa, anyone who characterizes the ultimate nature of reality in positive terms ultimately falls victim to the deeply ingrained human tendency towards reification. No matter what terms you may use to describe it, be it Brahman, plenitude, buddha-nature, the absolute, and so on, such a reified entity still remains an essentialist, metaphysical concept. Only a thoroughgoing negation can lead to full liberation from our tendency for grasping.

Table 1: Objects of Negation by Madhyamaka Dialectics According to Tsongkhapa

1. Intrinsic existence or existence by means of intrinsic nature *rang bzhin gyis yod pa*[65]	Instrumental case
2. Existing by means of self-defining characteristics *rang gi mtshan nyid kyis yod pa*	Instrumental case
3. Existing in-and-of-itself *rang ngos nas yod pa*	Ablative case
4. Existing in an absolute sense *don dam par yod pa*	Adverbial (*de nyid* case)
5. Existing as intrinsically real *bden par yod pa*	Adverbial case
6. Existing with thoroughly [definable] nature *yang dag par yod pa*	Adverbial case

For Tsongkhapa, an understanding of the nature of non-implicative negation is crucial to fully appreciate the scope of negation in the Mādhyamika's critique of intrinsic existence. This takes us back to the central point, i.e., delineating the scope of reason, especially in its role of negating essentialist ontology. Tsongkhapa argues that even the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school

of Bhāvaviveka cannot deny the view that the negation involved in establishing the theory of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) must be thoroughly non-implicative.[66] Tsongkhapa's point is this. Unless the negation involved in applying the Madhyamaka dialectic, which is aimed at arriving at the true cognition of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), is final and universal, the negation cannot fulfill its soteriological function. Interestingly, those who criticize Tsongkhapa's understanding of emptiness as a mere negation raise exactly the same soteriological objection.[67]

It is beyond question that Tsongkhapa saw the emptiness expounded by the Madhyamaka as a non-implicative, namely an absolute negation. It is, however, not a mere negation *per se*; it is an absolute negation of intrinsic existence. By maintaining this, Tsongkhapa is suggesting that the absence of intrinsic being is the ultimate nature of reality! And since, according to the Mādhyamikas, emptiness is the (ultimate) reality of things as they are (*tathatā*), the absence of intrinsic existence also becomes the reality of things as they are. This has been, of course, an object of vehement criticism by subsequent Tibetan thinkers. For example, Gorampa calls this 'nihilistic emptiness' (*chad stong*),[68] while Shakya Chokden labels it an 'inferior version of extrinsic emptiness' (*gzhan stong tha shal ba*).[69] Mikyö Dorje too makes a similar criticism. In their view, Tsongkhapa's notion of emptiness is inadequate and, therefore, cannot serve as the content of a liberating gnosis. They argue that such gnosis must have a more positive content.[70] Tsongkhapa would respond to this by arguing that his emptiness *can* serve as the content of an *ārya*'s liberating gnosis. For according to Tsongkhapa, insofar as the actual object of cognition is concerned, there is no difference between an *ārya*'s nonconceptual awareness and an inferential cognition of emptiness.[71] Moreover, in the context of inferential cognition, the negation of intrinsic existence *is* the cognition of the emptiness of intrinsic existence (*niḥsvabhāva*).

For Tsongkhapa the soteriological dimension of the Madhyamaka dialectic is crucial. He does not agree with those who assert that for the Mādhyamikas, argument and debate only function to critique an opponent's viewpoint. According to that assertion, argument and debate have only a reactive role within the Madhyamaka project. A Mādhyamika supposedly waits for an opponent to come up with a theory and then, by using his own logic, as it were, turns it back on him. A true Mādhyamika dialectician, the proponents of

this view argue, acts only as a parasite upon other philosophies, never committing himself to any conclusive thesis. This is in sharp contrast to Tsongkhapa's position. As far as he is concerned, these interpreters are only caught up in the rhetoric of *Prāsaṅgika,* and have missed the point. For Tsongkhapa, all types of reasoning found in Madhyamaka literature primarily function as self-criticism (if they can be called such at all). They are aimed at liberating the Mādhyamika's own mind from the deep-seated tendency for reification, which in Tsongkhapa's view is the fundamental obscuration lying at the root of all our suffering and which makes our existence unenlightened and imprisoning. Additionally, the dialectical nature of many of these arguments is designed to prevent the virtuoso Mādhyamika from succumbing to any of the possible metaphysical havens that he may otherwise seek. That many of these standpoints represent tenets of actual historical schools is, as far as Tsongkhapa is concerned, an interesting coincidence. In fact, it strengthens his point that these are possible routes one might quite naturally take to seek refuge if one is not vigilant through a critical approach. In *LN* Tsongkhapa writes:

> All Madhyamaka reasoning is part of the [overall] task of uprooting the apprehension of our fundamental ignorance, which is the root cause of [our unenlightened] cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*). Therefore, by identifying the manner in which your innate ignorant mind grasps [at entities], you should endeavour to bring about its elimination. You should not be attracted towards the scholarship that indulges in mere sophistic disputation with opposing philosophical schools.[72]

Earlier in the same book he writes:

> ... there is no contradiction between the fact that the non-analysing, innate apprehension of self-existence is the principal object of negation [of the Madhyamaka dialectics], and yet, in the [Madhyamaka] literature the refutation is done always through critical analysis. So, one should not think that it is only the intellectually acquired apprehensions and their contents that are to be negated.[73]

To summarise, by giving special attention to the various forms of negation in philosophical discourse, Tsongkhapa has sought to achieve two things. First and foremost, Tsongkhapa's aim has been to clarify and emphasise that the Madhyamaka refutation of the

essentialist ontology, an ontology that entails a belief in intrinsic existence, must be unqualified and absolute. Only by ensuring this, he contends, will Mādhyamikas succeed in their project of deconstructing all tendencies towards reification. Second, Tsongkhapa has endeavoured to establish that Madhyamaka emptiness is very different from mere nothingness. It is the absolute negation of intrinsic existence and not of existence in general. Thus, it becomes critical for Tsongkhapa to correctly delineate the scope of negation in Madhyamaka reasoning. In other words, the negation of intrinsic existence must be absolute and universal, yet it should not destroy the reality of our everyday world of experience.

Tsongkhapa's critique of autonomous reasoning

Now that we have followed the trajectory of Tsongkhapa's efforts to delineate the parameters of Madhyamaka reasoning, it is critical to look at the position held by reasoning itself. In other words, we must now address the following question: If, according to Tsongkhapa, Madhyamaka philosophy can be seen as denying all possible havens for some kind of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), does this mean that reason too is devoid of any intrinsic being? To answer this, we must explore what Tibetan interpreters of Indian Madhyamaka thought perceived to be perhaps one of the most crucial debates between two principal schools of interpretation of Nāgārjuna's thought. In its historical context, the dispute evolves through the writings of Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti following the former's criticism of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti's subsequent defence of his views.

From a contemporary philosophical point of view, a refutation of the autonomous syllogism represents a critique of what could be called the 'autonomy of reason' – that is, that reason, or logic, possesses its own ontological status as an independent, ultimate reality. This critique is too complex to be treated fully here, and substantive studies have already been done elsewhere on the issue.[74] In the following, I shall present a brief summary of the main arguments of this critique.

In commenting upon this ancient Indian philosophical debate, Tsongkhapa follows Candrakīrti very closely. Commenting on Candrakīrti's critique of the Sāṃkhya theory of self-production (*ātmotpāda*) in the *Prasannapadā*, Tsongkhapa clarifies extensively the fundamental philosophical difference between Candrakīrti's and

Bhāvaviveka's readings of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Like Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa demonstrates how behind the different methodologies of Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka lies a crucial philosophical difference.[75] Tsongkhapa shows convincingly, to my mind, that Bhāvaviveka's insistence as a methodological principle on the use of the autonomous inference (*svatantrānumāna*) as the final step in an argument reveals a metaphysical bias. It indicates his belief in the autonomy of logic, i.e., that the capacity for drawing inferences is intrinsic to logical forms.[76] It is crucial in an argument to ensure its correct form. This means that all the essential elements of an argument, such as of a syllogism, its highest expression – subject (*chos can*), predicate (*bsgrub bya'i chos*), inferring sign (*rtags*), and example (*dpe*) – must all be incontrovertibly established for both parties involved. So long as this requirement is not fulfillled, the argument cannot be valid – it will not have the power to give correct inferences. In fact, according to Bhāvaviveka, debate simply cannot begin, for there is not enough common ground to initiate a serious philosophical discourse. Being essentially a means of communication, argument presupposes a meeting ground between two disputing parties. That meeting ground, according to Bhāvaviveka, is the consensus the two parties share on the establishment of the key elements of the syllogism.[77] In his view, as Tsongkhapa reads it, the point of contention between two parties in an argument is the nature of the predication – e.g., whether to construe the relationship between the subject and its predicate as one of identity, or difference, or inclusiveness, and so on. Tsongkhapa rejects such a view.

For our convenience, let us formulate a typical syllogism as found in Bhāvaviveka and others like him.

(1)	All entities are not self-produced	*pratijñā*, thesis or predicate
(2)	Because all entities, internal and external, exist [and anything that exists is not self-produced]	*hetu*, reason or sign
(3)	As in the case of a clay pot.	*dṛṣṭānta*, example

Briefly stated, the thesis of logical autonomy as outlined here rests on two key premises, which according to Tsongkhapa are both untenable. The first is a metaphysical theory, viz. the assumption that there must be some intrinsic nature or being to things and events that makes them the true referent of language and concepts.

In Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka parlance, this is known as belief in the intrinsic existence of things.[78] This assumption, Tsongkhapa believes, underlies all essentialist metaphysics. The second is an epistemological corollary of this metaphysical view – a specific theory of knowledge. According to this view, knowledge is a state of understanding that is fresh (*gsar du*) and non-deceptive (*mi slu ba*) – that is, it must be free of vulnerability to uncertainty and indeterminacy.[79] Most importantly, it is gained through means that are themselves incontrovertible. This knowledge is principally of two kinds: perceptual (*pratyakṣa*) and inferential (*anumāna*). The first type is gained through perceptual faculties that are totally unalloyed, almost in the fashion of a pure mirroring. The second type, however, arises only through a process of reasoning that is valid and meets all logical criteria. Such knowledge, whether perceptual or inferential, is considered to be veridical not only with respect to the appropriate objects of perception. Even more importantly, it is perceived to be unmistaken with regard to the self-nature (*svarūpa*) of the object.[80] However, from Tsongkhapa's point of view, such knowledge is only a myth – there is no stage in one's understanding that is, by its very nature, logically immune to future doubts and uncertainty. Knowledge, like other conventions of our lived world of experience, cannot be defined outside the bounds of the framework of conventional validity. Citing Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa rightly points out that in worldly convention we label an understanding as 'valid knowledge' (*tshad ma*) as long as it fulfills the basic condition of being unmistaken with respect to its object.

Tsongkhapa's strategy for refuting autonomous reasoning involves three main elements. First, he demonstrates the untenability of the premise that both parties must incontrovertibly establish all the essential elements of the syllogism. Let us first take the case of the subject. Tsongkhapa argues that this logical requirement is too stringent and is actually impossible to meet.[81] He asserts that it is unrealistic to expect a consensus on the establishment of the subject of the argument. This would be like putting the cart before the horse.[82] For such consensus can only be reached, if at all, when the debate is over, not before the argument has begun. There can never be a real consensus between a Mādhyamika and an essentialist who hold diametrically opposing standpoints regarding the nature and ontological status of the subject.[83] Tsongkhapa states that the same objection can be raised against the status of the

reasoning sign (*liṅga*) as well. An essentialist ultimately believes in what Guy Bugault calls a synchronic identity; hence, as far as the essentialist is concerned, any subject of the syllogism is a self-enclosed entity. Bugault identifies two aspects to the essentialist's concept of identity, namely, synchronic and diachronic. The first relates to the notion of 'essence,' which makes it possible to speak about things-in-themselves. However, unless one can carve reality into discrete units, it is impossible to speak about a thing-in-itself without reference to others. The diachronic aspect assumes that in order for a thing to be considered identical with itself it must remain constant through time. Yet experience affirms the contrary, i.e., everything that exists is transitory.[84]

In contrast, for a Mādhyamika the subject in question is only a relative phenomenon whose reality and identity can only be established within the framework of a provisional worldly convention. Therefore, although different parties may use the same words in their discourse, their conceptions of the intended subject matter differ radically. According to Tsongkhapa, however, this need not obstruct the procedure of the argument. As long as there is a common ground between the parties in their choice of the subject of the argument – i.e., they both agree to refer to the subject by the same term and agree that both parties are cognizant of the subject through their pre-critical perspectives – it serves the purpose.[85] In other words, real debate can begin on the basis of assumptions wherein the subject, predicate, and sign (*liṅga*) are mutually agreed upon as actual rather than their having to be validly proven to be so in accord with mutually accepted criteria of knowledge.[86] By insisting on such logical strictures, Tsongkhapa contends, Bhāvaviveka has loss sight of the primary purpose of argument. In the Madhyamaka view, the purpose of argument is dialectic; it is to criticise all metaphysical standpoints by revealing their incoherence and untenability, thus liberating the person from the prison of such ontological 'safe havens.' Especially in the case of criticising actual philosophical schools, what better form of argument could there be than that of a *reductio ad absurdum* (*prāsaṅga*). By demonstrating the internal inconsistency and logical incoherence of essentialist metaphysical concepts, *prāsaṅga* releases the person from imprisonment to his own views.

The second element in Tsongkhapa's critique of the logical autonomy championed by Bhāvaviveka is to use an *ad hominem* argument against him. Again, by following Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa

points out a blatant contradiction in Bhāvaviveka's insistence on the logical condition that both parties must incontrovertibly accept all the essential elements of the syllogism. Tsongkhapa reminds us that Bhāvaviveka, being a Madhyamaka philosopher, accepts the validity of the following argument:

> Whatever is dependently originated is devoid of ultimate existence. For example, like the reflection of a face in a mirror, a sprout too is dependently originated.

If this syllogism is valid for Bhāvaviveka, he must accept the validity of its thesis, i.e., that a sprout is empty of ultimate existence. This means that the sprout is real only from the worldly perspective, i.e., it is a *saṃvṛti*.[87] This, however, is in conflict with Bhāvaviveka's thesis of autonomous syllogism. For according to that thesis, a sprout, being the subject of a valid syllogism between a Mādhyamika and an essentialist, must be established by means of true knowledge (*pramāṇa*) on the basis of mutually agreed upon criteria of validity. This means that if the opponent's criterion is to be met, the subject, a sprout, is an object of a consciousness that is veridical in relation to its intrinsic nature and identity.[88] This, however, is not acceptable, for if the sprout is only a conventional reality (*saṃvṛtisatya*), its reality is relative to a perspective, and therefore, it is false from the point of view of ultimate truth. Thus, Bhāvaviveka is led to an impasse: either he must abandon his insistence on the criterion of logical autonomy, or he must question his adherence to the fundamental Madhyamaka theory of the two truths.

Third, Tsongkhapa demonstrates the possibility of developing a form of argument (including syllogisms, where necessary) that could successfully lead to valid inferences yet need not entail any belief in the autonomy of logical forms.[89] Such types of argument are known as 'conventions familiar to the other' (*gzhan la grags pa*).[90] The point is that as long as the subject, predicate, sign, and examples of a given argument are acceptable to the opponent, i.e., to the other, they can play their relevant roles in the argument. These elements themselves do not possess any inherent power to draw logical inferences. This idea of conventions familiar to the other seems to affirm that it is due to many factors – such as the context of the argument, the beliefs of the opponent, certain conventions to which both parties subscribe, etc. – that an argument can effect an opponent's mind.[91]

For Tsongkhapa and, therefore, for Candrakīrti as well, reason can provide another, albeit subtle, outlet for our inborn tendencies towards grasping at solidity and at absolute beings. This is especially true for someone like a Svātantrika-Mādhyamika who has, to a large degree, deconstructed many metaphysical and epistemological concepts such as eternal soul (*ātman*), elementary *dharmas*, indivisible atoms, absolute consciousness, and so on. Yet since they have not deconstructed reason, Tsongkhapa contends, the last bastion of the ontology of intrinsic being still remains undestroyed.[92] When situated within this context, we can understand why Tsongkhapa, following Candrakīrti, gives so much attention to the critique of Bhāvaviveka's theory of logical autonomy.

We must now raise the question of the validity and coherence of Tsongkhapa's reading of the Madhyamaka dialectic. At the core of Tsongkhapa's approach seems to be the assumption of a systematic coherence in the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness. This means that, according to Tsongkhapa, a Mādhyamika should be able conceptually to articulate his so-called 'middle view' (*madhyama*) in a systematic way. Of course, this requires the Mādhyamika to maintain a 'meaningful' level of everyday world reality while rejecting all tendencies towards reification. According to Tsongkhapa, a correct delineation of the parameters of reason is crucial to this project so that the Madhyamaka dialectic does not work to destroy the validity of our everyday world of experience. In arguing thus, Tsongkhapa can be seen as continuing in the long lineage of Mādhyamika philosophers who have been sensitive to the charge that the Madhyamaka theory of emptiness is nihilistic. A further assumption Tsongkhapa appears to make, from what we have discussed so far, is that applying the Madhyamaka dialectic is crucial to the process of eliminating innate *avidyā*. Needless to say, this presupposes the centrality of reason in Madhyamaka soteriology. Clearly, those who wish to take issue with Tsongkhapa's reading of Madhyamaka philosophy may question these presuppositions.

My personal view is that if Madhyamaka philosophy is to be regarded as an important lineage within the Buddhist religious and philosophical milieu – and therefore, is understood to share the basic soteriological concerns of the Buddhist path – something similar to Tsongkhapa's interpretation of the school's key tenets is unavoidable. Tsongkhapa's distinction between the domains of the

conventional and ultimate perspectives, his insistence on a prior, correct conceptual identification of the object of negation, his differentiation of the various connotations of the all-important term 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*), and finally, the distinction he draws between that which is not found and that which is negated – all these elements contribute greatly towards a more coherent understanding of the Madhyamaka refutation of essentialist ontology.

If what I have sketched here represents an accurate reading of Tsongkhapa's understanding of Madhyamaka dialectics, then Tsongkhapa's defence of the Madhyamaka school against charges of nihilism appears to be rather different from his Indian predecessors. The Indian Mādhyamikas' response, on the whole, primarily involved invoking the idea of the illusion-like nature of reality. For example, in *BCA*, 9:11–17, Śāntideva defends ethical responsibility on the grounds that killing an illusion-like person accrues illusion-like karma. This approach is very much in line with the approach of the Mahāyāna sūtras wherein the doctrine of emptiness is presented through a multitude of metaphors, all of which intimate the illusion-like character of things and events. In contrast, in addition to invoking the illusion-like nature of reality,[93] Tsongkhapa's approach involves a logical dimension as well, in that he wishes to stipulate conceptually the parameters of Madhyamaka dialectical analysis. Perhaps the Indian Mādhyamikas felt that it was not necessary to determine analytically the scope of negation prior to a cognition of emptiness, for what *exists* is what is left behind in the aftermath of the application of the Madhyamaka dialectic. As a philosopher, however, Tsongkhapa is not satisfied by this assumption. He wants to demonstrate that the Madhyamaka dialectic does not destroy everything and that indeed the world of everyday reality is left intact.

CHAPTER THREE

Tsongkhapa's Deconstruction of the Self

Levels of selfhood according to Tsongkhapa

Tsongkhapa has made a thorough critique of the concept of self a key element of his thought. In doing so, he is not only following the long history of Buddhist philosophical thinking, but more importantly, he is following the natural path of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka dialectic. As will become evident later, Tsongkhapa regards the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka theory of emptiness of intrinsic existence (*niḥsvabhāva*) as the culmination of the Buddhist doctrine of 'no-self' (*anātman*). Nevertheless, at the same time Tsongkhapa subscribes to the basic premises of the doctrine of no-self as understood by most Buddhist schools. In fact, in his writings on Madhyamaka, Tsongkhapa presupposes a knowledge of the basic principles underlying the no-self doctrine. Briefly stated, the no-self principle makes the following general claims:

(a) The existence of the self as an independent, eternal, and atemporal unifying principle is an illusion.
(b) There is no need to posit an abiding principle such as *ātman* (or soul) to explain the nature of our experience or the laws of causality.
(c) The existence of persons must be understood in terms of the five physical and mental aggregates, which serve as the basis of personal identity.
(d) Grasping at self lies at the root of our unenlightened existence.
(e) The negation of the self lies at the heart of the path to freedom.[1]

For Tsongkhapa, whether or not the self exists is not merely an epistemological question, nor is it solely a therapeutic one – it is an ontological question as well. That is to say, it is a question regarding the ontological status of persons. Furthermore, Tsongkhapa understands the concept of self to be highly complex with degrees of reality (*phra rags*)[2] that are constructed at different levels of our thought processes. In Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka dialectics, discerning these levels is crucial to an ascertainment of what exactly is being refuted.

Earlier, we observed an interesting hermeneutical 'loop' in Tsongkhapa's philosophical approach in that a successful Madhyamaka dialectical process leads one from a state of pre-critical innocence through deconstructive analysis to a state of post-critical innocence. We also observed that, according to Tsongkhapa, the Madhyamaka dialectic does *not negate* the reality of our everyday world. This, we learned, is because the objects of our empirical world are not susceptible to a logical analysis that seeks to establish the metaphysical status of things (*a la* the distinction between the domains of conventional and ultimate discourses.) Given these elements, it is crucial to note here that by deconstructing the self Tsongkhapa is not rejecting in any way the validity of our commonsense notions of self and personal identity. As I shall argue in the next chapter, Tsongkhapa accepts the reality of a nominal self, which he calls the 'conventional self' (*tha snyad kyi bdag*). Certainly, like all Buddhist proponents of no-self, Tsongkhapa rejects the theoretical constructs of self proposed by many of the Indian non-Buddhist schools. More importantly, it is the metaphysical reality of the self that is the principal object of critique in Tsongkhapa's deconstruction of the self. Tsongkhapa makes this point succinctly in the following:

> Thus, there are two senses to the term 'self' (*bdag*): a self conceived in terms of an intrinsic nature that exists by means of intrinsic being, and a self in the sense of the object of our simple, natural thought 'I am.' Of these two, the first is the object of negation by reasoning, while the second is not negated, for it is accepted as conventionally real.[3]

So how do we approach the question of the existence and identity of the self according to Tsongkhapa? Before we respond to this question, it is perhaps useful to relate Tsongkhapa's critique of the self to contemporary Western philosophical discourses on the same

subject. There appear to be two distinct trends. The first emphasises an examination of an individual's particular identity as constructed on the basis of history, language, environment, gender, and so on. In other words, an analysis of the nature of the self becomes a search for a constructed reality that is thoroughly contingent. In contrast, the second approach assumes a degree of universality in the concept of selfhood: it is a search for the 'real' identity of the person that underlies our pre-philosophical intuitions about ourselves. One could say that the first approach emphasises the contingency and historical dimension of an individual's sense of self, while the latter is primarily a conceptual analysis of our sense of self. These two approaches roughly correspond to the generally accepted divide between continental European philosophy on the one hand, and Anglo-American analytic philosophy on the other. Tsongkhapa's discourse on the self actually has more elements in common with the second approach than the first, even though, in the final analysis, he would reject any notion of a metaphysically real self.

As a methodological aid, I would also like to draw attention to a recent characterization of theories of persons into two distinct approaches. By this, I am referring to Derek Parfit's division of the theories of persons into reductionist and non-reductionist views. According to Parfit, the reductionist theory presents the thesis that our existence is reducible to the existence of our body and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events. The theory also presents a reductionist account of our identity over time in that it suggests that our identity is also reducible to a set of impersonal facts about our brain or body and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events. By impersonal facts, Parfit is referring to those facts that can be described without explicitly claiming that we as subjects exist. The non-reductionist theories of persons reject both these two theses concerning our existence and identity.[4] Broadly speaking, all theories of persons of those who subscribe to the doctrine of self (*ātman*) can be characterized as non-reductionist, while the standard Buddhist theories of persons can be said to be reductionist in character. As will become clear as we continue, in contrast to the standard Buddhist view, Tsongkhapa's own theory of persons (and for that matter, the Prāsaṅgika view itself) is non-reductionist.[5] Let us now return to the main thread of our discussion.

The self as a permanent, unitary, and indivisible reality

From his earliest works on Madhyamaka, Tsongkhapa has been consistently clear on the point that there are degrees of subtlety in the understandings of the various Buddhist schools on the teaching of no-self. This claim is based on the premise that there are differences of subtlety in the various schools' identification of the self that is the object of negation (*dgag bya'i bdag*). Interestingly, in *LTC*, his earliest major work on Madhyamaka philosophy, Tsongkhapa does not explicitly use the terms 'subtle' and 'coarse' to characterize the self that is being negated by the various Buddhist schools. Instead, he speaks of the self that is the object of an 'innate' apprehension versus that of an 'intellectually acquired' apprehension. The terminology and associated philosophical and psychological ideas of subtle and coarse levels of selfhood are well established, however, by the time of the writing of *LN*.

Thus, a careful reading of Tsongkhapa's analysis of the levels of selfhood suggests that one can identify at least three distinct levels. First is the notion of the self as an unchanging (*rtag pa*), unitary (*gcig pu*), and autonomous reality (*rang dbang can*). This, according to Tsongkhapa, is the self that is postulated in one form or another by most of the ancient Indian non-Buddhist philosophical schools.[6] In *GR*, after describing the Sāṃkhya school's characterization of the self, Tsongkhapa writes:

> Just as the Sāṃkhyas accept the self, so too do other non-Buddhist [schools], who differ from each other by slight variations in their views about the characteristics of the self. For, example, the Vaiśeṣikas posit a self that possesses nine attributes, such as intelligence, pleasure, pain, desire, anger, effort, virtue and non-virtue, and the potency for action ...[7]

When viewed thus, the self is conceived as ultimately distinct and independent of the physical and mental states of the person. The self is the *ātman*, the individual correlate of the universal self, *Brahman*. It is the abiding principle that remains constant in contrast to the myriad, fluctuating elements of the world of empirical experience. In contemporary language, this principle can be characterized as the 'soul principle,' which is rejected by almost all schools of Buddhism. This is not to suggest, however, that there does not exist a great diversity among the non-Buddhist schools in their conceptions of *ātman* – some postulate it in terms of

substance while others regard it as an agent, and so on. The point here is that the proponents of the *ātman* doctrine all share certain key premises: they all maintain that the self is permanent, indivisible, and unitary. In the final analysis, all Indian proponents of the *ātman* doctrine subscribe to a form of strict non-reductionism regarding the identity and nature of the self.[8] This is, according to them, because the self is permanent while the aggregates are transient, the self is indivisible while the aggregates (*skandha*) are composites, and the self is unitary while the aggregates are multiple. By aggregates, I am referring to the standard Buddhist categorization of the physical and mental aspects of the individual: body, feelings, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Together, the five aggregates are said to constitute the existence and identity of a person. In Buddhist philosophical discourse, an analysis of the existence and nature of the self is often based on an analysis of these five factors of personal existence.

Tsongkhapa posits that all the various formulations of the concept of a self that is ontologically distinct from the aggregates are intellectually acquired apprehensions of selfhood. In other words, he is suggesting that the self thus conceived remains a theoretical construct, unrelated to our everyday experience. Tsongkhapa argues that to our everyday, naive, pre-philosophical common sense, the self and the aggregates do not appear as ontologically distinct. Thus, Tsongkhapa concludes that this concept of a self distinct from the aggregates can be found only in those whose minds are conditioned by metaphysical speculation.[9]

The self as a self-sufficient, substantial reality

The second level of selfhood is what Tsongkhapa calls the conception of a 'self-sufficient and substantially real self.'[10] Tsongkhapa's own writings on this second conception of the self appear to be somewhat contradictory. For example, in *LTC*, the earliest among what I consider to be Tsongkhapa's 'Madhyamaka classics,' there is not even a single mention of the phrase 'an autonomous and substantially real self' (*rang skya thub pa'i rdzas yod kyi bdag*). In contrast, in *LN* we find an extensive discussion of this level of selfhood. In this work, Tsongkhapa asserts that the self defined thus is a construct of philosophical reflection; therefore, it cannot be taken as the object of our natural sense of selfhood.[11]

This is because, according to Tsongkhapa, within such a concept of the self, the relation of the self to the physical and mental constituents is viewed in the manner of a master (*rje bo*) to his servant (*'khol*),[12] which creates a stark separateness between the two. Moreover, any apprehension of the self that involves viewing the self and the aggregates as separate is necessarily theoretical, for our innate notions do not relate to their objects in terms of such conceptualization.

We see a further change in Tsongkhapa's thought on this issue when he came to write *RG*. In this text, Tsongkhapa, in response to a question he raises about the master/servant analogy, suggests that viewing the self and aggregates in the above manner need *not necessarily* be intellectual. He seems to suggest that it is coherent to maintain that even innate apprehensions of selfhood *can* hold the view described above.[13] Finally, in *Elucidation*, literally his last word on Madhyamaka, Tsongkhapa explicitly states that an innate version of the conception self as a self-sufficient, substantial reality can exist.[14] Interestingly, in *GR* Tsongkhapa no longer uses the master/servant analogy to characterize the putative relationship between the self and its constituents. Here, Tsongkhapa draws a distinction between grasping the self as self-sufficient and substantially real on the one hand, and viewing the self as separate from the aggregates (*skandha*) with distinct characteristics on the other, the latter necessarily being a conscious, acquired concept.[15] Since there is no explicit acknowledgement from Tsongkhapa concerning a change in his views pertaining to this second level of selfhood, the convention among Geluk commentators has been to maintain that there are no conflicts between Tsongkhapa's earlier and later works on this issue. This has led to a great deal of confusion within the commentarial literature in determining what exactly is the notion of selfhood that is being denied in the Buddhist doctrine of no-self (*anātman*) as understood by the mainstream Buddhist schools, i.e., those other than the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka. In my view, it makes more sense to acknowledge that Tsongkhapa's thought shifts, although the change does not represent any major revision of his earlier thought.

So, how can we characterize this concept of selfhood? Changkya Rolpai Dorje (1717–86) suggests that according to Tsongkhapa this selfhood is nothing but the idea of a person's 'substantial reality.'[16] He bases his observation on the following passage from Tsongkhapa. In *GR*, Tsongkhapa writes:

> Although these [Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Svātantrika-Madhyamaka] schools maintain that *śrāvaka*s and *pratyekabuddha*s cognize the absence of substantial reality of persons, they do not accept that these beings have realized the absence of substantial reality of the two consciousnesses [mental and the foundational consciousnesses]. Therefore, when they speak of the absence of substantial reality of the person, they understand it only in terms of the [label] person itself rather than in terms of its basis, i.e., consciousness.[17]

Changkya's suggestion does seem to be borne out by other textual evidence. In a short meditation text known simply as *A Succinct Guide to the Middle View*, Tsongkhapa makes the following observation:

> If the person itself (*gang zag tsam*) is not to be negated, what predication is required [for the rejection of selfhood]? In many sūtras it is stated that the reality of persons must be negated. In *Nirṇayasaṃgraha* [it is stated that] the ultimate [reality of persons] should be negated, while in *Viniścayasaṃgrahaṇī*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, and *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, it is said that the substantial reality [of persons] must be negated. All of these are making the same point. Thus, the meaning of substantial reality and nominal reality is the following. When a thing [or an event] appears to the mind, if it does so in dependence on the perception of another phenomenon that shares characteristics different from said object, then the object is said to be a nominal reality. That which does not depend upon others in such a manner is said to be substantially real.[18]

As observed earlier, according to *GR*, such a notion of the self is not necessarily an intellectually acquired, conscious idea of selfhood. In fact, such a sense of self and identity occurs naturally in all of us and could be said to be pre-linguistic and pre-philosophical – or in other words, innate. This is, however, not to say that all aspects of our ordinary, commonsense notions of the self are valid. In fact, as will become clearer in our subsequent discussions, Tsongkhapa asserts that most of our ordinary perceptions of the world are tainted by an underlying assumption of the existence of intrinsic being, which is ultimately proven to be untenable.

On what grounds does Tsongkhapa suggest that the above selfhood is the object of an intuitive sense of self? Tsongkhapa alludes to a verse in Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*, which he reads as implying a kind of thought experiment.[19] The experiment can be formulated as follows. If a celestial being unimaginably attractive and possessing an enviable physique appears in front of you and proposes that you exchange your own body for his, would you be willing to do it? Similarly, if Mañjuśrī, the Buddha of wisdom, were to give you the opportunity to exchange your own unenlightened mind with his transcendent mind of true insight, would you be willing to accept the exchange? That in both of these cases we would most probably endorse the exchange suggests that in the depth of our mind there is a sense of self for whose benefit we are willing to dispense even with our own familiar body and mind. According to Dharmakīrti as read by Tsongkhapa, this is the strongest indication that even in the deepest recesses of our psyche there is a non-reductionist component to our sense of self – that is, the idea that the self cannot be reduced to a person's physical and psychological continuums. If we were to identify entirely and solely with our physical and psychological aggregates, it would be difficult to make sense of the above intuitive response. For, as Gyaltsap correctly points out, 'Who would enter into a barter in which the person himself were part of the exchange?'[20] This is, however, not to suggest that we never identify ourselves with any of our bodily or psychological states. If that were the case, the natural thought of 'I am injured' when it is actually my hand that is hurt becomes incomprehensible. I shall discuss the issues raised by such intuitive notions in the next chapter.

In the Buddhist world, the Personalist (Vātsīputrīya) school appears to subscribe to such a notion of self. According to the Vātsīputrīyas, the only positive thing that can be said about the nature of the self is that it is ineffable. We can assert neither that it is permanent, nor that it is impermanent. Similarly, we cannot say that it is one with the aggregates nor can we say that it is distinct from the aggregates. It is, nevertheless, inextricably connected to the physical and mental aggregates of the person. It is an 'agent' in that it is the doer (*byed po*) of all *karmic* actions, and a 'subject' for it is that which experiences (*dza ba po*) the fruits of such actions. Furthermore, it is the 'real person' that is imprisoned in the samsaric realms and liberated on the nirvanic plain. Hence, it is argued that the self must possess substantial reality.[21] According to

this view, the self is neither totally separate from the psychophysical complex nor identical with any of its physical and mental constituents, whether individually or collectively. This notion of self seems to be one of the principal objects of refutation in the ninth chapter of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya.*[22]

Tsongkhapa suggests that except for the Vātsīputrīyas, all schools of Buddhist philosophy other than the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka concur on the identification of the self that is being rejected within the context of the fundamental Buddhist tenet of no-self (*anātman*). In *LN* Tsongkhapa writes the following:

> With regard to the no-self of persons, all the other schools of both the Mahāyāna and Hinayāna traditions accept it in terms of the absence of substantial reality of a person that is self-sufficient and possesses characteristics contradictory to the aggregates ... However, the tradition of Candrakīrti upholds the view that even when the above 'substantially real' person is negated, still a person existing by means of intrinsic being and not merely constructed by convention remains not negated. And apprehension of the existence of such a person *is* an apprehension of the selfhood of person, for it is an apprehension of a person's 'real existence,' just as it is the case with apprehensions of the 'real existence' of its factors of existence.[23]

So far, we have identified the possibility of conceiving of the self in terms of an entity that is eternal, indivisible, and unitary. This, we learned from Tsongkhapa, is a way of conceiving the self as ontologically distinct from our physical and mental aggregates, which together constitute our existence. Incidentally, we also learned that this notion of self, or eternal soul (*ātman*), is that which is postulated in one form or another in most of the classical non-Buddhist Indian schools of thought. We then moved on to a second level of selfhood in which we identified a self conceived in terms of self-sufficiency and substantial reality. We learned that unlike the first, the second self can also be the object of our innate apprehensions, for in its pre-conscious form, this apprehension can be found even in the minds of those who are not conditioned by philosophical speculation. This, then, takes us to Tsongkhapa's third and final level of the concept of selfhood.

The self as intrinsic nature (svabhāva)

Tsongkhapa argues that unless all notions of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity are negated, there will always remain an attachment to the self.[24] Ultimately, therefore, the self to be negated is the person's 'intrinsic existence.'[25] Hence, for Tsongkhapa, the self (*ātman*) becomes intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*), and a belief in the intrinsic being of persons is a belief in self. In other words, the self to be negated by the Madhyamaka dialectic is now defined as intrinsic being. At this stage we see a clear redefinition of the word 'self' (*ātman*). Tsongkhapa maintains that this redefinition has already occurred in Indian Madhyamaka. He cites, with special emphasis, the following quotations from Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti. Buddhapālita states:

> The meaning of 'absence of self' that is referred to when it is taught [by the Buddha] that all things and events are devoid of self-existence is the emptiness of intrinsic being. For the word 'self' here is a term for intrinsic being.[26]

Similarly, Candrakīrti writes:

> The self is that intrinsic being, i.e., the nature of things that is [conceived to be] independent of others, and the absence of this [intrinsic being] is the [meaning of] no-self. This [self] is to be understood in terms of both the person and its factors of existence. Thus, there are two selflessnesses, the no-self of persons and the no-self of phenomena.[27]

Tsongkhapa elaborates on what Candrakīrti means by 'independent of others' in the following manner. He states that independence here equals independent being (*rang dbang ba'i ngo bo*), which implies an ontological assumption of a mode of being that is intrinsic and objectively real, and hence, not a mere nominal construct.[28] In Tibetan, there seems to be adequate etymological grounds for construing the meaning of self in terms of intrinsic nature. *bDag* (self) means self as a person in the context of speaking about self and others; it becomes a reflexive pronoun in certain usage such as in the context of *bdag skyes* (self-production or production from itself) contrasted with *gzhan skyes* (production from others). It can also mean intrinsic being, e.g., in the context of *bdag gi dngos po* (own being, or an intrinsic being) as opposed to *gzhan gyi dngos po* (being derived from other, or contingence).

Here we see that *bdag* (self) becomes synonymous with *rang gi bdag nyid* (self-nature, intrinsic being) as opposed to *gzhan gyi bdag nyid* (nature, or being, derived from another).[29] Once self, or *ātman*, is thus interpreted as intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), it no longer enjoys any privileged exclusive association with the notion of a subject as it does in many of the traditional Indian schools of thought. Instead, it becomes a universal concept, a reified ontological category, constructed by our tendency towards grasping at a solid ground or foundation. It thus becomes equivalent to many other reified concepts, such as intrinsic being (*rang gi ngo bo nyid*), intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin*), real entity (*bden pa'i dngos po*), absolute being (*don dam par grub pa'i ngo bo*), and self-defining characteristics(*rang gyi mtshan nyid*).[30] It is fair to say that for Tsongkhapa ultimately the problem of personal identity is not entirely separate from the problem of identity in general, but rather, it is a special case, or subset, of it. Given this, Tsongkhapa's analysis of the nature and existence of self differs in significant ways from many of his predecessors, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. His is not a search for a supposed real, or true, self. Rather, it is an analysis of the ontological status of the person. The question is: 'In what manner can one say that the self or person exists?' From a linguistic perspective, it is an analysis of what is the objectively real referent of our first-person singular pronoun 'I,' if such a thing indeed exists. As I shall argue later, in the final analysis Tsongkhapa rejects the notion that there is such an intrinsically real, 'true' referent.

Inadequacies of the Buddhist reductionist theory of no-self

According to Tsongkhapa, one of the key Indian Buddhist texts that lucidly outlines the Buddhist critique of the concept of self is the ninth chapter of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya.* Tsongkhapa believes that the refutation of selfhood as presented in this text constitutes the authoritative standpoint of the Abhidharma school.[31] This, as I have pointed out earlier, is also the understanding of the doctrine of no-self by all Buddhist schools, with the exception of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka. Tsongkhapa calls this 'the no-self of persons known commonly to the Mahāyāna and Hinayāna schools.'[32] However, Tsongkhapa does not believe that the understanding of no-self presented in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* goes beyond the deconstruction of the

first two levels of selfhood as identified earlier. This is because, according to Tsongkhapa, there still lingers within the individual some notion of a subject, or agent, possessing intrinsic identity and intrinsic existence even after the deconstruction of the self thus defined. So long as this is not destroyed, one cannot have arrived at a full understanding of the Buddha's teachings on no-self.[33]

Tsongkhapa argues that, given the predominantly reductionist character of their deconstruction of the self, the no-self theories of all the Buddhist essentialist schools as well as of the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka deal only superficially with the concept of self. Furthermore, the scope of their critique is limited solely to the conscious, philosophically acquired apprehensions of self, rather than also encompassing the underlying innate tendencies for grasping at self-identity.[34] Tsongkhapa argues that in the last analysis, the only self that is negated in the context of these Buddhist schools' deconstruction of self is the self postulated as distinct and independent from the person's psychophysical constituents.[35]

Needless to say, much of the force of Tsongkhapa's argument against Buddhist reductionist views of self derives from the close correlation accepted by all Buddhist schools between the fundamental doctrine of no-self and its underlying soteriological concerns, i.e., the quest for freedom from suffering. The central thrust of Tsongkhapa's argument is this: the negation of self as understood in the above terms cannot constitute a complete path to freedom because even after the deconstruction of this self many of the delusory states that are consequences of a grasping at self can still arise within the individual.[36] The point here is a simple one. Tsongkhapa is suggesting that without presupposing the existence of some degree of attachment to one's own identity, it is difficult to make sense of the occurrence of the various afflictive emotions within an individual.

Of course, Buddhist essentialists would argue that once the sense of self – conceived in terms of an autonomous, substantial reality – is destroyed, no basis remains for the arising of delusions and unwholesome emotions. At issue here is the nature and definition of what Buddhists call 'fundamental ignorance' (*avidyā*), which lies at the root of our unenlightened existence. To the essentialists, to apprehend a subject appearing to possess a certain degree of intrinsic identity and existence is not a delusion. It is not only a veridical consciousness, but it is also indispensable for any sense of

agency, individuality, and personal identity. Instead, for Tsongkhapa (and for that matter for Prāsaṅgikas like Candrakīrti), a belief in such intrinsic being is the root of all suffering and psychological imprisonment.[37]

For Tsongkhapa the two selflessnesses taught in the Mahāyāna scriptures, the no-self of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*) and the no-self of its factors of existence (*dharmanairātmya*) can only be distinguished from the standpoint of their bases, namely, the object that is devoid of self rather than the actual self to be negated.[38] Thus, in terms of subtlety there is no difference whatsoever between the two types of no-self. Furthermore, apprehensions of both types of self are said to lie at the root of our suffering and unenlightened existence. In *LN* Tsongkhapa makes the following concluding statement:

> The grasping at the two selves – (a) of the person, the object upon which our thoughts of 'I am' arise, and (b) of the person's factors of existence – is the primary fetter of [our] bondage. Therefore, these two [person and the factors of existence] are the principal objects upon which reasoning [into reality] negates all apprehensions of selfhood. It is also because of this that all such reasoning [into reality] must be subsumed under the two kinds of reasoning [namely, the reasoning that negates the selfhood of persons and the reasoning that negates the selfhood of the factors of existence].[39]

The Madhyamaka seven-point analysis of self: A brief outline

In deconstructing the self in *LTC* Tsongkhapa follows the basic structure of two specific arguments that are developed in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*. In scholarly Tibetan parlance the arguments are known respectively as 'the fivefold reasoning' and 'the sevenfold reasoning.'[40] The latter is an elaboration on the former. The five-point and seven-point analyses of the self explore the various metaphysical possibilities within which the relation between the self and the aggregates can be construed. The arguments involve the refutation of conceiving of the self in terms of the following possibilities:

(1) as independent from the aggregates
(2) as identical to the aggregates
(3) as dependent on the aggregates like an object inside a container
(4) as the basis of the aggregates
(5) as the possessor or 'appropriator' of the aggregates
(6) as the collection of the aggregates
(7) as a special configuration of the aggregates[41]

I shall not enter here into a critical examination of the seven points, for to do so would take us beyond scope of our present study. Briefly stated, the sevenfold argument demonstrates that insofar as our attempts to describe the nature of the self's relation to the aggregates remain essentialist, they will necessarily be either dualistic or monistic. For once there is an assumption of the existence of two entities with distinct, independent identities, then naturally one is led to conclude that either they are ultimately one and the same thing, or they are in some essential sense distinct from each other. In other words, from an essentialist metaphysical point of view their relationship can only be conceived either in terms of identity or in terms of difference, both of which are, at least from Tsongkhapa's point of view, revealed in the final analysis to be untenable.

The self is not independent of the aggregates[42]

As observed earlier, in Tsongkhapa's view all the ancient Indian non-Buddhist proponents of self (*ātman*) subscribe in one form or another to the view that the self is categorically distinct from the psychophysical aggregates of the person. Briefly stated, according to this view, the true self (*ātman*) is not the empirical self nor is it in any way identical with any of the physical and mental aspects of the person. The psychophysical constituents of the person are not only subject to the laws of causality and flux, they also dissolve at the point of death, whereas the pure *ātman* (the true self) of the individual continues to survive.

Tsongkhapa's critique of this conception of the self is complex, drawing from many different areas of Buddhist philosophical and psychological analysis. For Tsongkhapa, the central problem with positing the self as independent of the aggregates is that this makes it logically impossible to explain any meaningful relationship between an individual's putative self and his or her physical and mental aggregates. Briefly stated, the question of how an eternal,

unchanging entity like the self relates to its constituents, which are momentary, dynamic, multiple, and in constant flux, becomes inexplicable. With a sense of irony, Tsongkhapa asserts that this is akin to claiming that in some essential sense a horse possesses the properties of a cow![43] For Tsongkhapa, such radical dualism is simply untenable. Furthermore, Tsongkhapa argues that an entity that is eternal and unchanging is useless as a candidate for the self, for nothing can be said to have an effect on it.[44]

Not only that, to conceive of the self in such terms also precludes any possibility of giving a plausible account of how our natural sense of self arises. In our thoughts and behaviour, our sense of self, or personal identity, normally arises only on the basis of something that is composite, that is, our physical and psychological states. Tsongkhapa argues that any entity that is purported to be non-composite, permanent, and unchanging can never serve as the basis for the occurrences of I-consciousness.[45] Similarly, agency and subjecthood require something that has the capacity for action and cognitive behaviour. This, Tsongkhapa posits, is impossible for an entity that is unchanging, eternal, and indivisible, which the 'real self,' or *ātman* is supposed to be. Moreover, he argues, if such a radically distinct, enduring, and substantial reality exists within us, it must be observable in our experience. Yet, there is nothing in our experience to suggest this. Hence, Tsongkhapa concludes that there is no self that possesses characteristics radically different from our aggregates.[46]

On the surface, it would seem that Tsongkhapa is arguing that because the self conceived of in the manner described above cannot be observed, it therefore does not exist. Yet this is not, in my opinion, the full story. Tsongkhapa himself has belaboured the point of the difference between that which is 'not found to exist' and that which is 'found not to exist.' (See chapter 2.) Thus, how do we make sense of the above argument? As I have suggested earlier, if we accept that the central focus of Tsongkhapa's deconstruction of self is to question the very tenability of any essentialist metaphysical theory of self, the above argument gains greater weight. What Tsongkhapa is suggesting is this: Given that the proponents of the *ātman* theory are operating from the basic assumption that the self is ontologically distinct from the empirical facts of the person's existence, the self they are seeking must necessarily be one that possesses intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity. This entails a belief in a self that is not only metaphysically real but also possesses

an intrinsic nature that is self-enclosed and logically definable. Tsongkhapa argues that anything that is considered to be distinct from such a metaphysical entity must necessarily possess these characteristics. The problem with this is that no efficacious relation can be posited between two entities that are necessarily independent of each other.[47] This means that proponents of the *ātman* theory are compelled to maintain that the self and the aggregates are necessarily distinct. Unfortunately, the consequence that follows from such a view is that the self can be perceived independent of the aggregates. Since this is not the case, Tsongkhapa concludes that a self that is independent of the aggregates does not exist.

Tsongkhapa also resorts to arguments that appeal to our ordinary pre-philosophical intuitions about ourselves. Tsongkhapa borrows an argument from Candrakīrti and applies it in an ingenious way.[48] The argument referred to here is one that Candrakīrti uses to argue that in our 'ordinary' understanding of the world there is no conception of true separateness between causes and effects. In fact, we tend to assimilate the two by perceiving them as a single continuum. He gives the following example to illustrate his point: When a person sees the tree that has grown out of a small seed that he planted, he will spontaneously have the feeling 'I planted this tree.' Similarly, when a father sees his son who is now a fully grown man, he will still feel and say, 'He is my son.' In a strict sense, of course, the seed is not identical to the big tree, nor is the sperm the man, yet within the bounds of normal convention we treat them as if they are identifiable with each other.

Tsongkhapa argues that if we closely examine our commonsense notions of ourselves, we find that we often identify intuitively with either our body or our mind. When my arm is injured, I instinctively think, 'I am injured,' and I make the correct utterance, 'I am injured.' Similarly, when I have a strong emotion such as anger welling inside, I can truthfully say, 'I am angry.' Neither case implies in any way that I as a person am identical with my arm or with a particular emotional or mental state that I am experiencing.[49] The point of this argument is to demonstrate that in our natural conceptions of self there is no notion of an entity totally independent and separate from the mind/body aggregate. Such a notion of self is alien to the ways in which we normally conceive of our own identities; thus, a totally independent self must be understood as a revisionist construct postulated by philosophers who are uncomfortable with any idea of non-substantiality with

regard to self and personal identity.[50] As such, this conception of self remains the principal object of critique when Buddhists engage in philosophical disputes on the nature and existence of self with their non-Buddhist Indian colleagues. Tsongkhapa contends that the belief in the existence of a self that is eternal, unitary, and independent of a person's physical and mental constituents results from the simple failure to conceive of the possibility that perhaps the self could simply be a nominal construct.[51]

The self is not identical with the aggregates

If the self is not independent of the aggregates, one might wonder if perhaps it could be, in some essential sense, identical with the aggregates. To say that the self is in some way identical with the aggregates is to suggest that the self is ultimately reducible to its constituents. However, Tsongkhapa argues that neither individually nor collectively can any of the constituents be identified with the self. The self is not the body; it is not the feelings, nor is it perception, mental formations, or consciousness. The problem with any approach involving essentialist attempts to identify the self with the physical and mental constituents of the person is that such an approach leads to all kinds of ontological and epistemological difficulties. At least according to our naive pre-philosophical view, the psychophysical constituents, which are the only factual bases of our sense of self, are perceived to be multiple, in constant flux, and dependent on other factors. Hence, how can a self that is supposedly unchanging, unitary, and self-sufficient relate to these physical and mental faculties?

The thesis being refuted here is, on the whole, the standpoint of most Buddhist schools that accept the validity of a totally reductionist analysis of the concept of self. According to this view, although the person (*pudgala*) itself is thought to be only a nominal reality (*prajñaptisat*), the term 'person' must relate ultimately to an entity that is substantially real and has a greater degree of objective existence.[52] In other words, it is argued that just as empirical objects like jars, tables, and chairs can in the realist's ontology be ultimately reduced to the indivisible, substantial *dharmas*, so must the person be reducible to the real existence of the physical and mental states.[53] From Tsongkhapa's point of view, such a position derives from an underlying assumption that there must be a true or real person that can be perceived as the referent of our first-person singular pronoun

'I.' This, for Tsongkhapa, is a form of belief in the intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity of the person since anyone who subscribes to such a position does so because of an inability to be content with the mere nominal reality of persons. The belief is that behind the multiplicity of our empirical world of everyday reality and concepts there must be an entity that is enduring and unitary, and that serves as the basis of our being. In Tsongkhapa's mind such an apprehension is, in the final analysis, a form of clinging to the notion of self (*ātman*). Viewed thus, the objections that Tsongkhapa raises against this thesis, that the person is identical with the aggregates, gain greater force. Following in the long tradition of critical discourse initiated by Nāgārjuna and developed further by Candrakīrti, Tsongkhapa lists six key objections against the self/aggregates identity thesis, most of which are primarily conceptual.

Objection 1: The redundancy of the concept of self[54]

If the self were identical in some way with the physical and mental constituents, there would be no substantial ontological difference between the two. According to this view, 'self' becomes a mere synonym for the aggregates. That is to say that, at best, the self is only a different descriptive label for the same phenomenon or phenomena. This implies that in the final analysis, we can do away with the very idea of self. Tsongkhapa quotes the following verse from Nāgārjuna, which makes this point succinctly:

> If, apart from the appropriated,
> it is held that there is no self,
> [and if] the appropriated themselves *are* the self,
> Your [purported] self does not exist![55]

By arguing in this manner, Tsongkhapa is not implying that he perceives the self to be ontologically distinct from the aggregates. Instead, he is suggesting that as long as there is even the slightest belief in the intrinsic existence of the aggregates, the idea that the self is reducible to the aggregates remains untenable.

Objection 2: The absurdity of multiple selves[56]

According to Tsongkhapa, there is an inherent contradiction in the thesis that the self is ultimately identical with the aggregates. According to this thesis, the self and the aggregates become one and

the same. This leads to a fundamental incoherence at the core of our concept of selfhood. Our concept of self is based on a notion of an entity that is unitary, indivisible, and enduring, whereas our concept of the aggregates involves diversity, divisibility, and momentariness. Yet the principle of identity requires that if $A = B$, then ontologically speaking, everything true of A must also be true of B. This means that because the aggregates are multiple, a person's self must also be multiple. Conversely, because the self is unitary and singular, the aggregates must be so, too. Such consequences are clearly absurd.[57] Of course, the Buddhist essentialists could respond by maintaining that there is nothing wrong with the idea that the self as a singular construct is a nominal reality, while the aggregates, the perception of which gives rise to the notion of self, are multiple. The problem with this, from Tsongkhapa's standpoint, is that by believing in the intrinsic existence of the aggregates, the Buddhist essentialists have deprived themselves of any logically tenable explanation of the relationship between the self and its constituents. According to Tsongkhapa, a belief in the substantial reality of the aggregates entails a belief in the intrinsic being of the aggregates. This in turn entails a belief in entities that possess self-enclosed natures. And, any identity relation that holds between such entities is necessarily that of strict identity logically definable in the manner shown above. Again here, Tsongkhapa's criticism is focusing on the belief in the intrinsic existence of the aggregates.

Objection 3: The futility of karmic deeds[58]

Equating the self with the aggregates signifies that when the aggregates change, the self also goes through a similar transformation.[59] Since there is nothing in the nexus of our physical and mental constituents that remains unchanged over time, there is no entity that extends over the time period of the commitment of a *karmic* act and ripening of its effects. For the self who commits the act and the one who experiences the consequences of the action are essentially two different individuals with separate identities and natures. This, Tsongkhapa contends, contradicts the twin axioms of the doctrine of *karma*, namely, that (a) a *karmic* act committed never loses its potency, and (b) one can never experience the fruits of a karmic act not committed. The present argument pertains to the first axiom. Of course, this objection trades on the pan-Indian belief in the doctrine of rebirth and its correlate, the theory of

karma, that is, the law of cause and effect. However, the validity of the argument does not by any means depend on the validity of these doctrines. The central point of the argument is that if the self and aggregates are identical, then there is nothing to account for our concept of personal identity through time. In this case, even the simple fact of a person making a contradictory statement becomes unintelligible. Why? Given that nothing is constant within the psychophysical complex of the individual, if the person is identical with the aggregates, then the person who made the earlier statement and the one who contradicted it are not the same.

Objection 4: Experiencing the fruits of acts not committed[60]

This objection is a corollary to the preceding argument. If there is no enduring entity within the psychophysical constituents of the person, and if the aggregates *are* the self, then there is no one person who both commits a *karmic* act and faces its consequences. For the person who committed the act and the one who is encountering the results of the action are not the same. Both this argument and the argument above relate to the important ethical question of moral responsibility.

The above two objections should not be read as an argument against moral accountability based on the theory of *karma*; Tsongkhapa himself clearly subscribes to the doctrine of karma. The force of the argument derives from the intimate connection that Tsongkhapa perceives between the essentialist's concepts of identity and the key underlying assumption, the idea of being or entity that Tsongkhapa calls *rang bzhin* (*svabhāva*, *svarūpa*), often translated as 'own-being,' 'self-nature,' 'intrinsic being,' or by some, simply 'essence.' The point is that if the self is identical with the aggregates in some essential sense, and if the aggregates are substantially real, there is nothing to account for the continuity of the person. When the physical and mental aggregates disintegrate, given that they are intrinsically real entities, the process of cessation must be absolute. This means that the aggregates, and therefore the self, cease to exist once disintegrated.

Objection 5: The impossibility of genuine recollection[61]

If, like the aggregates, the self is momentary, there is nothing to connect the various instances of the self into a single continuum. Since the very identification of the self with the aggregates

presupposes a belief in intrinsic identity, the individual moments of the self become discrete, isolated entities with their own individual identities. This means that in actual fact the various instances of the self are totally independent of each other. If this is so, there is no ground for claiming that a person can genuinely remember his or her past experiences since the person who underwent the experience and the one who is recalling the memory are not the same.[62]

This is reminiscent of Candrakīrti's argument against the standard Buddhist theory of continuum. In fact, Tsongkhapa compares objection five with two arguments found in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*.[63] First is the argument against the Buddhist essentialist's account of the nature of distinctness between the succeeding temporal stages of a thing or a person.[64] According to the essentialist view, given that things and persons possess intrinsic being, any distinctness between objects will necessarily be intrinsic as well. This means that insofar as the nature of distinctness is concerned, there is no essential difference between, for example, Devadatta being distinct from another person, like Dharmadatta, and Devadatta being distinct from his own earlier temporal stages. If this is so, then just as one cannot maintain that Devadatta and Dharmadatta constitute a single continuum, so too one cannot maintain that the various temporal stages of Devadatta form a single continuum. The consequence of this is that there are no grounds to suggest that Devadatta can remember the experiences of his earlier temporal stages. The second argument is Candrakīrti's well-known objection against the theory of 'origination from another.'[65] The gist of the argument is this. If something comes into being from causes that are intrinsically different from itself, one could claim that anything could produce anything. For example, there is nothing wrong in maintaining that darkness can be produced from flame! This is because no notion of causal relation is tenable between entities that are purported to be intrinsically distinct from each other. Thus, such a concept of distinctness can be maintained only if we accept that the nature of this distinctness is in some essential sense absolute.[66]

Objection 6: Conflating the agent and the object [of action][67]

As in the previous objection, this argument involves a deep examination of our concept of person and its relation to the psychophysical constituents. The analysis here involves examining

the relationship between what Tsongkhapa (following Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti) calls the 'appropriator' (*nye bar len po*) and the 'appropriated' (*nye bar blangs bya*).[68] In the present context, the aggregates are the appropriated and the self, or person, the appropriator. Simply put, the argument is this. If we examine our natural sense of self and its relation to our psychophysical aggregates, we find that the notion of agency plays a crucial role. When I say, 'I am looking out of the window,' I have a sense that it is *I* who is engaged in the act. A close examination of this idea of action reveals that even merely by making such a simple statement we have already made an intimate connection between the self and the psychophysical aggregates, which are, in the current context, the eye organ and visual perception. According to Tsongkhapa, the above relationship can best be described in terms of a process of 'appropriation.' In other words, even in the simple act of seeing, the self appropriates the physiological and sensory faculties in order to make that cognitive event the act of a person. However, if in actual fact the self is identical with the aggregates, the very ground for distinguishing between an object of action and its agent disappears. This, then, makes the very idea of agency untenable.[69]

Tsongkhapa seems to regard this argument as one of the most forceful objections against the self/aggregates identity thesis. When criticising the various positions on the nature and existence of the self,[70] Tsongkhapa cites with a tone of finality this point regarding the possible conflation of an object of action and its agent as philosophically untenable. He sees this concept of agency as intimately connected with the Madhyamaka understanding of the nature of designation and labels, which is, of course, related to the ontological nominalism of the Madhyamaka. According to Tsongkhapa, the relationship between the designative base (*bdags gzhi*) and the designation (*btags chos*) in the context of self is best described in terms of agency.[71] In this view, a person's physical and mental constituents are the designative bases, and the self, or person, is the designation. How do these physical and mental constituents serve as the bases of such a designation? Let us take the simple case of the eye organ. What does it mean to say that the eye organ is 'appropriated' by the person? Tsongkhapa explains that when a person engages in the act of looking at an object, it is the eye organ that actually makes it possible to see the object. So, in a sense, it is the eye organ that makes the individual a 'looker' – in other words, an agent.[72]

Rejection of the remaining five metaphysical alternatives

Tsongkhapa also examines various other metaphysical theories regarding the relation between the self and the aggregates. These are, in one form or another, different ways of conceiving the thesis of identity in difference. This thesis also includes the possibility of conceiving the relationship of the self and aggregates in terms of location and locatee (*rten brten pa*), and of conceiving the relationship of substance and quality either in terms of inherence or in terms of possession and possessor (*ldan pa*). Critiques of all of these positions are found in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and its related commentarial literature, including of course Tsongkhapa's works.[73] Candrakīrti adds two more alternatives to the list: viewing the self as the assemblage of the aggregates (*tshogs pa*), or alternatively, perceiving it as a unique form (*dbyibs*) evolving from the particular configuration of the various aggregates that constitute the individual person.[74] The last two can be seen as possible extensions of an attempt to identify the self with the aggregates. The key objection to the last two alternatives is that the collection (of the aggregates) and the form are both still aspects of the aggregates; therefore, each is a basis of designation (*gdags gzhi*) and not a designation (*btags chos*) itself.[75] Tsongkhapa states that this objection applies equally to all essentialist attempts to identify the self with the person's physical mental continuums.[76]

Where does Tsongkhapa's critique of the three levels of selfhood leave us in terms of our understanding of the existence and nature of the self (or its absence)? If there is no self that is eternal and independent from our mind/body complex on the one hand, and if the self cannot be identified wholly with our mind/body complex on the other, then what constitutes our identity as a person across time? Before we explore these questions, we have one crucial task to accomplish. Our analysis so far has revealed that, according to Tsongkhapa, the Buddhist critique of self is ultimately a critique of the concept of intrinsic existence. It is a critique of all metaphysical views that entail a belief in any notion whatsoever of self-nature, own-being, or intrinsic reality, conceived in terms of both existence and identity. In view of this, it is crucial now to examine the concept of intrinsic being (*svabhāva*) in some depth and to explore what it means to reject intrinsic existence.

An analysis of the concept of intrinsic existence

Before we embark on our exploration, we must analyse a few of the critical Sanskrit terms that are key to Tsongkhapa's understanding of the concept of intrinsic existence. These are *svabhāva*, *svarūpa*, *svalakṣaṇa*, and *prakṛti*. The first three terms share the philosophically pregnant prefix *sva*. The classical Tibetan equivalents for these words are, respectively, *rang bzhin* (intrinsic nature), *rang gi ngo bo* (intrinsic being), *rang gi msthan nyid* (self-defining characteristics), and again, *rang bzhin*.[77] Although, linguistically speaking, these three terms – *rang bzhin*, *rang gi ngo bo*, and *rang gi mtshan nyid* – have distinct senses, Tsongkhapa often uses them interchangeably, implying that in some sense, they share the same referents. Perhaps one of the most systematic definitions of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) in Nāgārjuna's writings is that found in the fifteenth chapter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Tsongkhapa agrees with Nāgārjuna that the notion of *svabhāva* (intrinsic nature) is incompatible with the idea of causation. This is because causation implies contingency, whereas an intrinsic nature entails an unchanging, independent entity. Tsongkhapa elaborates on this point by arguing that anything that is contingent must be created or, better still, fabricated, and since 'created' (*bcos pa*) and 'uncreated' (*ma bcos pa*) are mutually exclusive, nothing can be said to be both. Hence, he concludes that intrinsic being (*gsis*) and contingency (*byas pa*) cannot coexist in a common locus.[78] As in the case of the English word 'fabrication,' the Tibetan word *bcos ma* has a double meaning. It can mean something being constructed in the straightforward sense, and it can also mean something artificial. I think both Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa trade on this double meaning to make their point that contingency and possessing an intrinsic nature are incompatible.[79]

In order to bring home the inherent contradiction between the concepts of contingency and intrinsic nature, Tsongkhapa gives Candrakīrti's example from our ordinary, everyday experience. In *RG* Tsongkhapa writes:

> Even within worldly convention the heat of [boiling] water and artificial rubies created by jewellers from *kaṛketana* are not regarded as natural properties of these things.[80]

Candrakīrti asserts that even in ordinary language we would never describe the quality of being hot as something intrinsic or essential

to boiling water. Intrinsicality entails naturalness, whereas the heat of boiling water is 'artificial' in that it is acquired.[81] In one sense, Candrakīrti is suggesting that the heat is a temporarily borrowed property. However, both Tsongkhapa and Candrakīrti seem to go further. They argue that to be thoroughly consistent, even within the bounds of ordinary linguistic convention, we must accept that, ultimately, even the heat of a fire is not its intrinsic nature. Just as the heat of boiling water is caused by other factors so is the heat of fire. As it is a product of causes and conditions, it is contingent, and according to Candrakīrti, nothing that is contingent can be either uncreated or intrinsic.[82]

According to Tsongkhapa, a belief in intrinsic existence often results from a confusion between uniqueness and intrinsic nature. He writes that,

> The childish grasp at the intrinsic nature of things, even though such natures do not exist. And when they see that [property] in one and not in others, they cling to the idea that, for instance, heat is the unique property of fire and make assertions that it is so. By so doing, they are suggesting that the intrinsic nature [of a thing] is also its defining characteristic. Because of this convention, the Buddha too taught in the Abhidharma a conventional [notion] of 'self-defining characteristics' (*svalakṣaṇa*) and taught that common properties such as impermanence and so on are 'general,' or shared, characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*). Although heat as fire's essential property and impermanence as composite phenomena's characteristic do not exist even at the conventional level, we can accept, given that one is unique while the other is common, that a distinction is drawn in the Abhidharma between unique characteristics and general characteristics. Therefore, there is an enormous difference between existing by means of self-defining characteristics or own-being on the one hand, and [possessing] defining characteristics that are unique to a phenomenon on the other.[83]

Tsongkhapa contends that because of this natural tendency to conflate uniqueness and intrinsic nature, the Buddha, out of compassionate skilfulness, made a distinction between the 'unique characteristics' (*svalakṣaṇa*) and the 'general, shared characteristics' (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*) of a phenomenon. By this Tsongkhapa is referring to two distinct approaches in Buddhism to understanding

the nature of phenomena. One is meditative contemplation whereby the individual penetrates the nature of a phenomenon by means of focusing on its individual and general characteristics. The other is a key aspect of the realist ontology of the Sautrāntikas wherein this distinction between unique and general characteristics lies at the heart of the interface between epistemology and ontology.[84] As stated in the above quotation, it is not the general principle of the distinction that Tsongkhapa is criticising (for he himself accepts such a distinction); rather, it is the notion, for example, that heat is an intrinsic nature of fire that is being questioned.

The importance of not conflating the senses of *svabhāva* in terms of uniqueness and intrinsic nature suggests the critical importance of appreciating the different contexts in which the notion of *svabhāva* emerges in Buddhist philosophical discourse. Tsongkhapa identifies three principal contexts. He writes,

> In the epistemological texts, functional things alone are described as 'unique particulars' (*rang mtshan*); in the Abhidharma sūtras, unique properties, such as the heat of fire, that distinguish one thing from another are taught as unique characteristics (*rang mtshan*). [There is also] intrinsic being (*rang mtshan*) in the sense of something existing by means of self-defining characteristics. The differences [in meaning] between these are indeed very great.[85]

Thus, we have three different connotations of the term *rang mtshan*: (1) *rang mtshan* as 'unique particulars,' (2) *rang mtshan* as 'unique properties,' and finally, (3) *rang mtshan* as 'intrinsic being.'[86] What repeatedly emerges here is that the property of heat cannot be regarded as ultimately intrinsic to fire. One may be able to define fire in terms of heat, but this does not mean that heat constitutes the ultimate nature of fire.

So what exactly is the definition of intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*) that is being negated by the Madhyamaka in relation to all things and events? Tsongkhapa sees the following passage from Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* as pivotal in articulating the Madhyamaka critique of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity:

> Intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) is that which is non-contingent (*akṛtrima*)and not dependent on others (*nirapekṣa*).[87]

Tsongkhapa begins his comments on this verse by posing two questions: (1) What are the defining characteristics of an intrinsic

nature (*svabhāva*)? and (2) What exactly *is* this intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*)? While responding to the first question, Tsongkhapa elaborates on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā's* cryptic definition of *svabhāva*. In addition to non-contingence and independence, he adds one more feature: invariability (*ma khrul ba*).[88] In doing so, Tsongkhapa is closely following Candrakīrti's reading of the passage. This, then, gives us the following definition. The intrinsic nature of fire, for example, must be such that:

(a) it must not be 'artificial' or contingent (*ma bcos pa*) – i.e., it must be innate to fire;
(b) it must also be invariable to fire in all the three times, i.e., past, present, and future (*dus gsum du me la mi 'khrul ba*);
(c) it must be, unlike the heat of boiling water, not dependent on other factors (*rgyu rkyen gzhan la ma bltos pa*).

In order to do greater justice to Tsongkhapa's treatment of this issue it is worth quoting from Tsongkhapa's own words at some length. In response to the first question concerning the definition of *svabhāva*, Tsongkhapa writes:

> Since here 'own-being' is termed 'intrinsic nature,' we shall call that thing of an entity that is 'its own' its *svabhāva*. What makes something its own? It is that property of the thing that is non-contingent. Whatever is contingent is not its own – for example, the heat of [boiling] water. That which is not dependent on others too is its own, such as one's servants and wealth. In contrast, that which is dependent on others is not its own, such as temporary fame over which one has no control. This does not mean that everything that is contingent and dependent on others cannot be said to be its own. What is being demonstrated here is that insofar as something is its own, in the sense of being the intrinsic nature of a thing, it must be neither contingent nor, like a borrowed item, dependent.[89]

Following a close reading of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, Tsongkhapa unpacks the concept of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) by correlating *svabhāva* with other crucial terms. In the above he seems to equate it in the following ways:

> *Svabhāva* or intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin*) = own-being (*rang gi ngo bo*) = being-its-own (*bdag gi ba*) = non-contingent or

unfabricated (*ma bcos pa*) + not dependent on others (*gzhan la rag ma las pa*).

Thus, we find that, in the final analysis, the meaning of *svabhāva* as defined in *MMK* 15:2b is reduced to a concept that is inextricably connected to our notions of identity. In Tibetan, *bdag gi ba* (being-its-own) can also be interchangeably used with *nga yi ba*, which literally means 'mine.' In fact, the same word, *bdag gi ba*, is also used to translate the Sanskrit term *mama* (mine), which is closely associated with the Buddhist discussions on egoism, where 'I' (*nga*) is contrasted with 'mine' (*nga yi ba*) as objects of our natural, innate thought 'I am.' It is exactly because of this that Tsongkhapa distinguishes between two senses of 'being-its-own.' One is the conventional sense, where we can talk about one's own body, wealth, and friends as being 'mine'; the second is the sense of intrinsic nature of being. Needless to say, we are concerned here only with the second sense. So the question is, when can something be said to be its own? In other words, by what criterion can something be said to be the intrinsic nature of a thing? Answer: That which is non-contingent and not dependent on others. Is there such an intrinsic nature or *svabhāva*? If so, what is it?

Tsongkhapa paraphrases Candrakīrti's response to this question from *Prasannapadā* where Candrakīrti states that 'it [*svabhāva*] does not exist by means of its own-being nor is it non-existent.'[90] Of course, Tsongkhapa takes this to mean that according to Candrakīrti, the *svabhāva* of a thing *does* exist but not by means of some kind of intrinsic nature. To substantiate his point, Tsongkhapa cites, in addition to the above quotation from *Prasannapadā*, two passages from Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*. The first passage stresses the point that *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna must exist, for otherwise all the efforts of the bodhisattvas engaging in the path of the perfection of wisdom would be fruitless. Candrakīrti concludes by saying that not only does such *svabhāva* exist, it is also the object that is cognized by an awareness that is free from the obscurations of misknowing.[91] The second passage is the one where, according to Tsongkhapa, Candrakīrti asserts, 'Such *svabhāva* is not only accepted by the master [Nāgārjuna], but one can also enable others to accept this point. Hence, this *svabhāva* is presented [by Nāgārjuna] as if it is already established to both [parties].'[92] What, then, is this *svabhāva*? Tsongkhapa answers:

> It is the nature of all things, this nature is their intrinsic nature, and this intrinsic nature is their emptiness. The emptiness is the absence of intrinsic existence, which is suchness [the way things really are], and remains unchanged and permanently abides in the nature of suchness.[93]

From the above it is clear that, so far as Tsongkhapa is concerned, *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna in his fifteenth chapter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* does exist, and it is none other than emptiness itself, namely, the emptiness of intrinsic existence (*niḥsvabhāva-śūnyatā*). How does Tsongkhapa square this claim with the central Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka assertion that all things and events are empty of intrinsic existence? Doesn't emptiness itself become the exception? Given that it is *svabhāva*, doesn't emptiness exist by means of its own intrinsic nature? This is indeed the crux of the issue. Simply put, the problem is this. If emptiness exists by means of *svabhāva* – by means of an intrinsic nature – what point is there in maintaining that all things and events are empty of intrinsic existence? Moreover, doesn't Nāgārjuna himself warn against the perils of medicine itself becoming poison? On the other hand, if emptiness doesn't exist as *svabhāva*, what significant sense can we make of the claim that it is the 'mode of being' of all things?

Of course, Tsongkhapa does not believe that emptiness is an exception to the principle that nothing possesses intrinsic existence. In the final analysis, Tsongkhapa's solution to this problem involves drawing a critical distinction between 'to be an intrinsic nature' (*svabhāva*) and 'to exist by means of intrinsic nature.' Tsongkhapa accepts the first and rejects the second. Something, for instance *x*, can be said to be the *svabhāva* of a thing, but *x* can never exist by means of *svabhāva*. For Tsongkhapa, emptiness is the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) in that it is the ultimate mode of being of all things and events; yet, it cannot be said to exist by means of an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), for the latter would imply that emptiness exists in some essential or absolute sense. Emptiness equals *x*'s absence of intrinsic existence, which is *x*'s own nature in that it is non-contingent and not dependent on others. However, emptiness cannot be said to be its own nature independently of a subject. Hence, when emptiness itself becomes the existential subject *x*, it cannot be said to be its own nature (*svabhāva*), for it is equally absent of intrinsic reality. Instead, it is now the emptiness of emptiness that is *x*'s own nature.[94] This predication could, in principle, go on *ad infinitum*.

This situation demonstrates how, when a property in a first order predication becomes an existential subject in a second order predication, its ontological status too is revealed to be equally empty. Needless to say, according to Tsongkhapa emptiness should not be taken as a property in any affirmative sense.[95] Rather, emptiness is the absence of intrinsic existence as argued by the Mādhyamikas – that all things and events are empty of intrinsic identity and intrinsic existence. Furthermore, in terms of being empty of intrinsic existence, there is no distinction whatsoever between everyday objects such as tables, chairs, and so on on the one hand, and what Tsongkhapa considers as ultimate truth – that is, emptiness – on the other. So in Tsongkhapa's view, when a Mādhyamika says that everything is empty, he really means everything, which includes even emptiness itself.

Given this, there must be a way of defining *svabhāva* (intrinsic being) such that it can be negated equally in relation to both empirical objects and emptiness. In other words, how do we define *svabhāva* so that its negation embraces the entire spectrum of existence? Let us invoke an observation we made earlier regarding the diverse connotations of the term *paramārtha* (ultimate). We spoke of *paramārtha* in the sense of an *ārya*'s final insight into the ultimate nature of reality (*don dam dpyod pa'i rigs shes*), and *paramārtha* in the sense of absolute reality (*don dam par grub pa*).[96] While no empirical objects can be said to exist from the perspective of the first *paramārtha* (ultimate), the situation is different with respect to emptiness; in fact, emptiness itself exists from that perspective. It is the very thing that is found by a critical awareness probing into the ultimate nature of reality. However, *nothing* can be said to be true from the second perspective, i.e., *paramārtha* in the sense of an absolute. Tsongkhapa would draw exactly the same distinction here. In Tsongkhapa's mind, the two senses of *svabhāva* are distinguished primarily on the basis of their contexts, which are, in turn, determined by the grammatical cases in which the term *svabhāva* is used. Tsongkhapa associates usage of the term invariably with ontological contexts; as a result, *svabhāva* becomes identifiable with the principal object of negation by the Madhyamaka dialectic.

For the sake of convenience we can speak of the two connotations of *svabhāva* by drawing a distinction between *svabhāva* and *svabhāva**. The first refers to a universal ontological

status that is negated across the board, while *svabhāva** cannot be rejected in such a categorical manner. Let me elaborate further.

1) *svabhāva* = existing by means of intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin gyis grub pa*)

In this sense, *svabhāva* refers to an intrinsic nature of things that is thought to be self-enclosed, independent, and possessing self-defining characteristics. According to this view, *svabhāva* becomes synonymous with many ontological terms (as noted in chapter 2, table 1) that are rejected by the Mādhyamikas.

2) *svabhāva**= emptiness (*śūnyatā*)

In this sense, *svabhāva* is the absence of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity of all things and events and is also the ultimate mode of being (*paramārtha*) of all things and events. This is the sense of *svabhāva* defined by Nāgārjuna on the basis of two criteria: non-contingence and independence.[97]

What is the relation between these two connotations of *svabhāva*? More importantly, in which sense of *svabhāva* does the Mādhyamika negate the intrinsic existence of all things and events? From his earliest writings on the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness Tsongkhapa has been extremely clear in identifying the main sense in which *svabhāva* is being refuted.[98] In *LTC* Tsongkhapa criticises those who confine their understanding of the nature of *svabhāva* only to Nāgārjuna's two criteria, namely, non-contingence and independence. Tsongkhapa argues that such an approach reduces the force and scope of the Madhyamaka project of refuting all possible grounds for reification. He is suggesting that to define *svabhāva* only in terms of the above two criteria causes one to fall victim to the fallacy of under-negation.[99] Tsongkhapa presents several interrelated objections, all of which, unsurprisingly, relate to his deep concerns for the soteriological implications.

Tsongkhapa argues that although it is true that if an entity exists by means of its own intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), it must be non-contingent and independent of other factors, yet non-contingence and independence in themselves cannot exhaust the full meaning of *svabhāva*.[100] If this were so, then the Mādhyamikas would have no dispute with the essentialists on the ontological status of empirical objects. Even the essentialists (the Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas) do not deny the contingent and dependent nature of phenomena

given their acceptance of the fundamental Buddhist principles of momentariness and conditionality of all existent things.[101] So when notions such as non-contingence and independence are refuted in Madhyamaka literature, we should, according to Tsongkhapa, understand that these are refutations of certain aspects of *svabhāva* that do not in themselves constitute the totality of the Madhyamaka critique of *svabhāva*. The parallel here is that the statement, 'whatever is a jar is necessarily impermanent,' does not imply that impermanence constitutes the meaning of the term 'jar.' One is only making a statement concerning a particular characteristic of the jar.[102]

Tsongkhapa further argues that, similarly, one could charge someone with the consequence that, if an entity is posited as established in an absolute sense, that entity must be indivisible and unitary. At the same time, that indivisible entity itself cannot be taken as the central object of negation in the context of understanding emptiness. That is because the apprehensions of such pseudo-entities as, for instance, indivisible atoms are specific only to people who are conditioned in their ways of thinking by philosophical speculations. Therefore, such apprehensions cannot be regarded as being at the root of our unenlightened existence. Furthermore, the realization and meditative experience of the non-existence of such indivisible entities cannot undermine the most fundamental misapprehension – our fundamental ignorance (*avidyā*) – which has been present from beginningless time.[103] Because of this, even if one were to perfect this cognition of the absence of these entities into a direct, unmediated experience, it would not uproot the innate delusion of ignorance and its derivative afflictions. Tsongkhapa concludes his discussion of this issue with the following observation:

> Therefore, conditioned phenomena such as eyes and so on do not exist in terms of *svabhāva* in the sense of being established by means of their intrinsic natures, nor do they exist in terms of *svabhāva* in the sense of being the ultimate nature of things. Thus, they do not exist in terms of *svabhāva* in any sense at all. The ultimate truth [on the other hand] does exist as *svabhāva* in the sense of being the ultimate nature of things. However, the criteria by which it is affirmed as *svabhāva*, namely, non-contingence and independence, themselves do not exist even in the slightest way as *svabhāva*

defined in terms of existing by means of their intrinsic natures. They exist merely on the conventional level.[104]

Our study so far seems to reveal that in the final analysis, Tsongkhapa does not take the definition of *svabhāva* in terms of non-contingence, independence of others, and invariability as suggested by Candrakīrti as constituting the final understanding of the meaning of intrinsic existence. Although he accepts what appears to be Candrakīrti's key point – that the notion of an intrinsic nature is incompatible with causation – Tsongkhapa does not appear to give much weight to Candrakīrti's overall argument wherein the definition of intrinsic existence is developed primarily through associating *svabhāva* with 'naturalness' and 'unfabricated by other things.'[105] As we observed earlier, for Tsongkhapa these are partial aspects as opposed to the whole meaning of intrinsic existence. Furthermore, according to Tsongkhapa, to confine one's understanding of intrinsic existence only to such criteria would result in the problem of under-negation. Tsongkhapa's own preferred approach seems to be to rely on the psychological insight that somehow we instinctively impose a kind of intrinsic existence and identity in our thoughts and perceptions when we relate to the world, including to our own existence. In other words, he is suggesting that when we perceive things and events, we do so as if they enjoy some kind of objective, intrinsic reality that is independent of mind. This, he would suggest, results from our basic human tendency to reify, which Buddhists would argue is a natural expression of our fundamental ignorance (*avidyā*). In brief, as we observed in chapter 2, for Tsongkhapa the *svabhāva* that is the object of negation by the Madhyamaka dialectic must pertain to both a fundamental ontological status of things and events as well as to their identities.

That the notion of identity is integrally connected to the Madhyamaka analysis of the concept of *svabhāva* is beyond doubt. The etymological basis for this thesis is very strong, especially in the Tibetan language. The Tibetan term *rang gi ngo bo* (intrinsic being, or self-nature) can also be translated as 'one's own face.' In this sense, 'being' (*ngo bo*) also has the connotation of identity, for it is that which distinguishes us from others. The face is the principal feature of the body by which we generally recognize a person in relation to others. So, *ngo* has multiple meanings. In addition to 'being,' 'identity,' and 'face,' *ngo* can also mean

'surface,' 'angle,' 'perspective,' and interestingly enough, also 'genuine.' Admittedly, Tsongkhapa does not draw explicit correlations among these various meanings of the term *ngo*. Nevertheless, the common thread that connects these different meanings appears to be the notion of identity, for all of these ideas have something to do with our understanding of identity.

The close association of our notions of identity with existence as exemplified by the concept of *svabhāva* has profound philosophical implications. It suggests that there is a fundamental problem of circularity inherent in the concepts of existence and identity. Identity presupposes existence in that it assumes the existence of an entity, since without an entity with an enduring nature, how can we make sense of any notion of identity? After all, identity must be an identity of something that remains constant through time. Yet existence, or entity, seems to presuppose identity, for it may be asked, how can we even begin to talk about something that doesn't possess an identity? For example, when we say such and such a person exists, we take it for granted that we are talking about someone who has a recognizable face (*ngo*)! Because of this circularity, it can be argued that, unless we define them in conventional terms, both existence and identity become untenable. Tsongkhapa is clearly aware of this critical problem. In fact, he repeatedly stresses that the crux of the philosophical challenge for a Mādhayamika is not so much the actual deconstruction of *svabhāva*; rather, it is to maintain a coherent and meaningful notion of dependently originated existence and identity in the aftermath of a thoroughgoing negation of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity.[106]

Guy Bugault has suggested an interesting way of looking at the problem of identity as underlined by Madhyamaka thought in terms of exploring what he calls the 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' aspects of identity. He writes:

> Now, it seems to us that in this strong sense, that of intrinsicness, the concept of identity of a thing with itself has a double dimension: synchronic and diachronic. The first implies a precise determination of an existence, and would thus verge on an essence, including what this existent is and excluding what it is not ...
>
> There is another aspect of identity to which Buddhists are particularly sensitive: the diachronic aspect. In order to

> meaningfully think that a thing is identical with itself, one must suppose that it remains constant throughout time. Now, experience tells us that everything which exists is transitory and impermanent: *sarvam anityam.*[107]

Tsongkhapa would agree that, unless we are talking in the conventional sense, identity as characterized above with dual aspects is not possible. However, if things and events do possess intrinsic natures (*svabhāva*), they must also have identities as characterized above. Judging by his analysis of the concept of intrinsic existence, we can infer that Tsongkhapa is sensitive to the synchronic aspect of identity as well. He argues that in order for something to be an intrinsic nature, it must be something that is 'its own' (*bdag gi ba*). This 'being-its-own' has been defined in terms of two criteria – non-contingence and independence. An identity that is intrinsic must be non-contingent in that it must relate to that unique thing that makes the entity what it is. In some sense it must necessarily be true of the entity. Independence, on the other hand, ensures that the identity the thing possesses is not something that is defined in contrast to others, for such an identity would be relative. In other words, independence entails that an identity is not derived through difference. However, the existence of such an identity is untenable for it goes directly against the fundamentally interconnected and conditioned nature of existence (*pratītya-samutpāda*). One could say that not only is the material existence of a thing dependent upon others but even the identity of a thing as it is, is intimately linked to the identity and existence of others.[108]

No-self as the emptiness of intrinsic existence

From the above, we can now conclude that for Tsongkhapa to say that no self exists is to say that persons do not exist by means of intrinsic natures. In other words, he is saying that when Buddhists reject the notion of self, it is the intrinsic reality of persons that is being denied, in terms of both their existence and identity. Tsongkhapa is suggesting that any conception of persons that entails a belief in some form of intrinsic being is untenable. Because, as shown earlier, the concept of intrinsic nature is incompatible with causation. Furthermore, the intrinsic existence and identity of things and persons have been shown to be both logically untenable and conceptually incoherent. As suggested

before, this untenability of intrinsic existence is not confined to persons alone. It is true of the entire spectrum of reality: that is to say, the whole universe is said to be empty of intrinsic existence. Tsongkhapa exhorts the Mādhyamika aspirant to extend this insight to all factors of existence. In both *LTC* and *GR* Tsongkhapa quotes the following verse from *Samādhirājasūtra* to underline the point:

> Just as you have discerned the [nature of] self,
> So must you extend this [insight] to all.
> All phenomena are thoroughly calmed in that sphere
> As [if assimilated] into [infinite] space.[109]

In fact, in *LTCh* Tsongkhapa states that insight into the emptiness of intrinsic existence of persons – the no-self of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*) – must come prior to insight into the emptiness of all phenomena. This, he argues, is because to realize the no-self of persons is easier (*sla ba*) than to cognize the no-self of its factors of existence.[110] Tsongkhapa does not tell us why this is so. Perhaps his suggestion is based on the premise that compared to the various physical and mental states, the nominal nature of the person can be demonstrated more easily. In fact, as pointed out earlier, except for the Vātsīputrīyas, all classical Indian Buddhist schools accept in one way or another that the person is a nominal reality (*prajñaptisat*).

We can now put forth in broad strokes some of the key conclusions derived from Tsongkhapa's deconstruction of the self. First and foremost, it is evident that Tsongkhapa rejects any notion of a self that possesses intrinsic existence or intrinsic identity. All three candidates for such an intrinsically real self – a self that is independent and possesses an ontologically distinct status from the physical and mental states, a self that is ultimately identifiable with the physical and mental states, and a self that is neither of the previous two but possesses instead an ineffable, indeterminate existential status – have all been shown, at least to Tsongkhapa's mind, to be utterly unsuitable as candidates for the imagined self. The moral we can draw from this is that any metaphysical attempt to ground the self in an essentialist ontology is bound to be frustrated. This is because underlying all such attempts is the fundamental assumption of the presence of the *svabhāva* of the self, which, in Tsongkhapa's opinion, has been demonstrated to be untenable by Madhyamaka dialectics. Furthermore, we have found that at the very heart of our concepts of identity and entity is a

fundamental problem of circularity: one presupposes the other. This makes the notion of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity incoherent on an ultimate level. Thus, we are forced to conclude that identity and existence can only be maintained as thoroughly contingent and in some profound sense 'unreal.' Surely, we have arrived at a most radical proposition! However, this is only one part of the story. The cogency and strength of Tsongkhapa's deconstruction of the self cannot be judged purely on the basis of his arguments against metaphysical theories of the self. They also depend on the extent of Tsongkhapa's success in formulating his own constructive theory of persons. Thus, we must relate Tsongkhapa's deconstruction of the self to his reconstruction of persons following an application of the Madhyamaka dialectic. The challenge is to determine what kind of conception of person emerges at the 'post-critical' level.

CHAPTER FOUR

Personal Identity, Continuity, and the I-consciousness

Personal identity and dependent origination

If, as Tsongkhapa contends, there is no intrinsically real referent to our first person pronoun 'I,' how can we account for the unity of our experience that seems so overwhelmingly apparent? What makes a series of experiences 'mine' as opposed to someone else's? How do we account for the many phenomenal facts that contribute to our conventional notions of personal identity, including, amongst others, the unity of consciousness, memory and recognition of previously experienced objects, self-consciousness, and motivated, sustained activity for future results? These questions point towards the fundamental problem of understanding the relationship between our concepts of identity on the one hand and the unity of human experience on the other. It may, perhaps, be useful to reflect here on two questions that John Perry raises in his introduction to *Personal Identity.* Perry suggests that the main technical problems for a theory of personal identity are related to answering the following two questions:

(i) What relation obtains between simultaneous events of a person's life where these events are said to be events belonging to the same person?
(ii) What relation obtains between person-stages that can be said to be stages of the same person?[1]

I certainly agree with Perry that any viable theory of personal identity must deal with these two questions. This is because they pertain to the fundamental issue of the relationship between

identity and unity. In addition, a viable theory of persons must also be able to give a coherent account of the perspectives of our first-person notions of selfhood.

Strictly speaking, Tsongkhapa would answer that since there is no real, substantial person with intrinsic existence and identity, no relation can obtain between the stages of such a person. Yet Tsongkhapa must accept a degree of objective coherence that allows us to account for the fact that phenomena do appear to maintain distinct identities. In other words, even according to Tsongkhapa, there must be something that differentiates one thing or event from another.

Although 'personal identity' as a technical term most likely evolved within the context of Western philosophy, I do not see as problematic applying it to Tsongkhapa's thought, which stands clearly outside the Western philosophical tradition. Tsongkhapa speaks of seeking the 'defined person' (*gang zag gi mtshan gzhi*). In this compound phrase, *gang zag* means 'person,' whereas *mtshan gzhi* means 'the basis of definition.' For example, in presenting the Yogācāra theory of persons, Tsongkhapa writes,

> Those who accept [the theory of the] foundation of all [consciousness] (*ālaya*) maintain that the foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) alone is the defined person.[2]

If we relate the task of identifying *who* or *what* the person is to Tsongkhapa's underlying ethical and soteriological concerns, we can infer that Tsongkhapa's defined person appears very much like what is called 'personal identity' in contemporary Western philosophical discourse. As Tsongkhapa's theory of persons has not attracted any serious study in contemporary Western scholarship, I shall endeavour in this chapter to explore in some depth the various aspects of his theory. Inevitably, this will involve a certain amount of exegetical analysis. However, I shall strive to keep my exegesis to a bare minimum so as not to clutter the main lines of our thought.

Tsongkhapa's use of the term *mtshan gzhi* (pronounced *tsen shi*), which literally means 'the basis of exemplication' and can be translated roughly as 'illustration,' needs to be approached with caution. This is because, generally speaking, within the language of Buddhist epistemology, to which Tsongkhapa subscribes, an 'illustration' is the basis upon which a definiendum is defined. Thus, for every definition there are three basic elements: illustration (*mtshan gzhi*), definiendum (*mtshon bya*), and definiens (*mtshan*

nyid). For example, in the case of defining a vase, *vase* is the definiendum, and *a bulbous object that has a flat base and can retain water* is the definiens. That which instantiates the definiendum – for example, a golden bulbous object that has a flat base and can retain water – is the illustration. Epistemologically speaking, the cognition of an illustration is understood to take place prior to the cognition of the definiendum.[3] However, this usage of *mtshan gzhi* appears to be different from Tsongkhapa's own use of the term within the context of his analysis of self and persons. For, in the latter context, *mtsan gzhi* has the sense of 'that which is found to be the thing,' hence, my choice of the term 'identity.' And by personal identity, I am referring to that which is presupposed when we speak about the life of a person, or when we attribute certain actions to an individual. I believe that this much is a basic supposition that any theory of personal identity must accept.

It is not surprising that with regard to the roles that the so-called 'defined person' is expected to play, there seems to be broad agreement amongst the mainstream Indian philosophical schools (both Buddhist and non-Buddhist). From the epistemological perspective, the concept of person must be able to account for our unity of experience including such phenomena as self-consciousness, memory, and the ability to recognize previously experienced objects. From the point of view of ethics, the presence of a 'defined person' allows us to understand moral responsibility, the basic laws of *karma*, and our concepts of agency. And most importantly from the standpoint of the Indo-Tibetan schools, the supposition of such an entity makes it possible to present a coherent soteriological account of *nirvāṇa*, or *mokṣa* (spiritual freedom), and the individual's path to attain it. Even a thoroughgoing deconstructionist like Tsongkhapa does not reject these shared premises.

As to what exactly that defined person is, there are differing opinions amongst philosophers. Tsongkhapa often identifies three principal theories of persons: (i) the standpoint of the non-Buddhist Indian schools, (ii) the standard Buddhist theory of persons, and (iii) the standpoint of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka.[4] Tsongkhapa uses this threefold division of the principal theories of persons in almost all of his discourses on the self and persons, and characterizes his own preferred position as a theory of 'self as a mere construct, contingent [upon other factors].'[5] The three key

Chart 1 'Who' or 'What' is the Person?

(1) ātman (soul)	(2) skandhas (aggregates)	(3) the mere I (nga tsam) – that is, the object of our innate, natural I-consciousness.
Non-Buddhist schools	Buddhist essentialists	Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka

(2a) Vaibhāṣika	(2b) Sautrāntika	(2c) Cittamātra	(2d) Svātantrika-Madhyamaka
Collection of the five aggregates	Continuum of mind/body complex	(2ci) Scripture-based: the *ālaya* consciousness (2cii) Reason-based: the mental consciousness	Mental consciousness

theories of persons and their Indian proponents are shown below. (See chart 1.)

The first division, that of the non-Buddhist schools, is a non-reductionist but revisionist view of persons in that it identifies the 'real' person as an entity that is irreducible and independent of the physical and mental constituents of the person. (See chapter 3 for definitions of reductionism and revisionism.) Theories belonging to the second category are both reductionist and revisionist. They are reductionist because the underlying premise is that ultimately the person is identical with the aggregates, either collectively or individually. They are revisionist in that the theories suggest a revision of our conventional notions of ourselves. Finally, Tsongkhapa's own preferred theory of persons, the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka view, can be described as both non-reductionist and non-revisionist[6] in that it advocates a theory of persons that is in accordance with our natural, conventional sense of self.

For Tsongkhapa, the first two standpoints reveal a deeply ingrained tendency towards reification. More importantly, they reflect a fundamental metaphysical bias that, according to him, is both erroneous and unjustified. By this, I am referring to what Tsongkhapa perceives as a philosophical assumption common to many schools, that is, the belief that behind every conventionally valid name and concept (*prajñaptisat*, *btags yod*) there must be something that is ultimately real (*dravyasat*, *rdzas yod*).[7] In other

words, terms and concepts must have some ultimate referents in the objective world. Therefore, when we search for the true nature of the self or person, we should ultimately be able to find something substantially real. Moreover, each school sees its own candidate for the 'defined person' as reflecting a subtler and more penetrating analysis compared to the others. In *LN* Tsongkhapa writes,

> As regards the question 'By apprehending [things], in what way does it constitute adhering to the notion of intrinsic existence?' I shall first state the views of the philosophical schools.
>
> There are conventions such as [the propositions] 'This person committed this act' and '[He] experiences this consequence.' [In understanding these] they analyse by thinking whether the aggregates themselves are the person, or whether the person is some entity different from these, and so on. [In other words] they are able to posit an agent for *karmic* acts and so on only when they discover the person as one of the possibilities when searched for in terms of whether it is identical [with] or different [from the aggregates] and so on. And when the person is not found in this way, they are unable to posit it[s existence]. Thus, they are not content with the convention 'person' as a mere construct and analytically search for that basis or [real] referent of the term. When the [existence of] person is posited in this way, then one is [effectively] positing a person as existing by means of its self-defining characteristics. All Buddhist schools, that is [except for Prāsaṅgika] from Vaibhāṣika to Svātantrika-Madhyamaka think [about the nature of things] in this manner.[8]

Tsongkhapa rejects this key essentialist assumption and asserts that there is no need to find the 'real' person that seems to underlie our conventional labels of self or person. According to Tsongkhapa, the main fault of the non-Buddhists lies in their inability to be content with the nominal reality of the self and person.[9] The Buddhist essentialists, on the other hand, fail to accept the nominal existence of aggregates.[10] In contrast, the Prāsaṅgikas are at ease with a worldview within which no entities enjoy any privileged status of intrinsic reality.[11] Just as the person is real in name and concept only – i.e., is *prajñaptisat* – so too, according to Tsongkhapa, are the psychophysical aggregates, in reliance upon which the notion of

person naturally arises. When we examine Tsongkhapa's treatment of the positions of the other schools on the self and personal identity, a question arises as to whether he is justified in considering as essentialist the standpoint of the lower Buddhist schools.[12] Does Tsongkhapa not accept the common view that apart from the Vātsīputrīya and a few other personalist schools, all Buddhist tenets deny the existence of the self and accept the unreality of the person (*pudgala*)? According to these Buddhist schools, the person is found in the final analysis to be a mere construct, real only in name and concept. Certainly, Tsongkhapa accepts this standard reading of the Buddhist perspective. He takes issue, however, with the thoroughly reductionist approach of the Buddhist essentialist schools and the conclusions they draw from it. According to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, the essence of this reductionist standpoint is this: the self (*ātman*) does not exist; the person (*pudgala*) exists but is real in name and concept only; and finally, it is the aggregates that are ultimately real.[13] Therefore, Buddhist essentialists maintain that all expressions associated with persons – such as 'I' (*aham*), 'self' (*ātman*), or 'individuality' (*puruṣa*), and so on and their corresponding concepts – must ultimately refer to the aggregates.[14]

It is not difficult to see how Tsongkhapa can criticise this reductionist approach as one that leads to eternalism. This is because underlying such reductionism is the deeply held belief that the impersonal elements that constitute the person, such as the five aggregates, are ultimately real and enjoy substantial ontology. Interestingly, like the Vātsīputrīyas, Tsongkhapa also seems to argue that Buddhist reductionism entails a form of nihilism as well. However, Tsongkhapa's objection is different from that of the Vātsīputrīyas. The essence of the Vātsīputrīyas' argument against the Buddhist doctrine of no-self is that a reductionism of person into aggregates is tantamount to the denial of a person's conventional existence. This is precisely because the aggregates lack the unity and identity over time that is required of the person as we conventionally conceive of it.[15] In contrast, Tsongkhapa's objection of nihilism trades on the pan-Buddhist belief that an *ārya* in deep meditative equipoise on the path of direct seeing cognizes the 'absence of self' (*anātman*). Tsongkhapa argues that if, according to Buddhist essentialists, the person ultimately consists of the individual's physical and mental aggregates, when an *ārya* directly cognizes no-self, he or she must perceive the non-existence

of the aggregates as well. This is because, according to the Buddhist essentialists, the aggregates *are* the person.[16] Invoking the well-known distinction between the two connotations of self corresponding to their differing contexts cannot provide an adequate escape, argues Tsongkhapa. In a peculiar way, Tsongkhapa contends that the Buddhist essentialists cannot take the liberty of attributing different meanings to the term 'self' depending upon the context. Tsongkhapa does not allow the hermeneutic recourse that would allow these Buddhist essentialists to maintain that 'self' in the context of an *ārya*'s cognition of 'no-self' refers to an eternal, enduring entity, while the 'self' in the context of moral agency refers to an individual's psychophysical aggregates.[17] Why does Tsongkhapa deny the Buddhist essentialists this seemingly reasonable interpretive recourse? To understand this, we need to appreciate a subtle, but crucially vital style of argument that is so pervasive in Tsongkhapa's philosophical writings.

In drawing attention to this critical style of argumentation, Tsongkhapa makes the following point in *GR*:

> When others [Buddhist essentialists] posit the aggregates or the mind as the self, they do so without understanding that persons are posited by means of convention alone. Rather, they do so by means of searching for that [real] referent of the terms thus used. If this is so, the aggregates or the mind that is [found to be] the self is [effectively] a self that exists by means of its own intrinsic being. And, when [the *ārya*s], through their direct insight, 'see' the absence of self, they will also cognize the total non-existence of such a self. Because of this, the opponent's position is open to the objection that the *ārya*s would [also] realize the non-existence of the aggregates and the mind, which are said to be the self. In contrast, those who posit [the person] by means of convention alone and not by means of searching for the [real] referent behind language are never vulnerable to the above objection.[18]

The essence of Tsongkhapa's argument here is this. A reduction of the person to the psychophysical constituents of the individual is based upon a supposition that there must be something substantial and objectively real that is the real referent of our concepts and language of personhood. Therefore, the Buddhist essentialists' identification of the person with his or her impersonal elements occurs as a culmination of an objective quest for a substantially

existent and ultimately real person. Whether it is the continuum of mental and physical aggregates, or the mere collection of the aggregates, or the consciousness, or a unique faculty such as the 'foundational consciousness' – as a result of a philosophical analysis into the mode of being of the person *it* is being posited as the 'real' person. As we learned in chapter 2, such analysis constitutes 'analysis pertaining to the ultimate,' for it goes beyond an acceptance of the mere conventionality of the self and personhood and stems from an urge to look beyond our conventional notions of personal identity.[19] In short, by pursuing such a quest, one is searching for an essence beyond our concepts of person and selfhood. Therefore, according to Tsongkhapa, whatever that essence might be – whether consciousness or a mere continuum – it would have to be an entity possessing intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity, because it would be found to exist *as such* at the conclusion of an analysis into an ultimate mode of being. This supposed entity, if such a thing exists, could only exist as something substantially real and totally independent from other factors. However, as we learned earlier, this is exactly what is being negated in the context of the Madhyamaka account of Buddha's teachings on no-self. Therefore, according to Tsongkhapa, since the noble *ārya*s – whose cognitions are undeluded, and thus true – cognize the absence of self directly, this would necessarily mean that the Buddhist essentialists would be forced to accept that the *ārya*s must also realize the non-existence of the aggregates! This, however, cannot be the case for this would mean that the aggregates do not exist at all, which would be to fall into nihilism.

One possible defence of Buddhist reductionism of personal identity could come from scriptures wherein the Buddha seemed to have undeniably stated that the aggregates alone are the objects of our apprehensions of selfhood. In a sūtra, the Buddha is reported to have stated the following:

> O the fully ordained ones (*bhikṣu*s), be they monks or *brahmin*s or anyone else who perceives with the thorough apprehension 'I am,' thoroughly view thus only on the basis of these five appropriated aggregates.[20]

Candrakīrti has responded to this line of defence by arguing that the Buddha's expression 'aggregates alone' should not be taken in an affirmative sense.[21] Its function is purely negative in that it is aimed at rejecting any entity that is independent of the aggregates

as being the object of our apprehensions of selfhood. In other words, the significance of this expression is to reject the existence of an independent self that is distinct from the aggregates. Tsongkhapa elaborates on this point in the following manner:

> Therefore, it is clear that the [sūtra statement] 'they view [the self on the basis of] the aggregates' suggests that the self that is named in reliance on the aggregates is the object [of our innate apprehension of self]. This is because the aggregates themselves [on the one hand] and something that is independent from the aggregates [on the other] are both found not to be the object of the apprehension of self.[22]

From Tsongkhapa's point of view, perhaps the greatest flaw in the Buddhist essentialist theories of persons is that they are at such odds with our deeply ingrained conventional beliefs about our own existence. The ultimate reduction of the person into impersonal aggregates, which are essentially a collection of causally connected momentary phenomena, seems to directly contradict a fundamental feature of our ordinary notions of personal identity, which seem to reflect a high degree of a coherent unity and identity over time. Thus, the Buddhist reductionist approach entails an unacceptable level of revision. Of course, one could rebut this objection on the grounds that it is our conventional beliefs that need to be corrected rather than rejecting a reductionism of persons. This raises a serious philosophical question about Tsongkhapa's basic philosophical orientation towards the validity of our everyday world of experience. The question also has ramifications in our understanding of what is in need of correction in the context of the philosophical endeavour of the Mādhyamikas. Briefly stated, Tsongkhapa takes very seriously the Buddha's statement that he does not have any dispute with the conventions of the world.[23] In fact, Tsongkhapa admonishes us to preserve the validity of many of our conventional beliefs about the world. He seems to maintain that instead of revising our actual concepts of ourselves we should retain them so that we can use them in our efforts to discern the lines between our actual mode of existence and our imagined reality.

Does the above mean that there is nothing wrong with our conventional beliefs about what we are, and that the task of a Mādhyamika aspirant is to return, as it were, to our pre-critical, natural conceptions of ourselves? Is Tsongkhapa advocating a form of return to ordinary language as a means of liberation? Of course,

there are some who argue that this is essentially the case, at least with respect to Candrakīrti's position.[24] However, I do not think that Tsongkhapa's position on the validity of our conventional beliefs can be understood in such simplistic terms. Certainly, with Tsongkhapa's insistence on the need to respect the actuality of our conventional ideas, there is an element of a call for a return to what we might call the truth of ordinary language and its epistemological counterpart, our pre-philosophical, intuitive notions of ourselves and the world. Yet at the same time, as the following quotation demonstrates, it also cannot be denied that in Tsongkhapa's view all our conventional beliefs are, to a large degree, tainted by our deeply ingrained, innate grasping at self and at the intrinsic existence of things.

> Until one reaches the ground of [fully enlightened] buddhahood, there is no state of consciousness that is not tainted by the imprints of fundamental ignorance (*avidyā*), except for the *ārya*s' nonconceptual pristine cognition in meditative equipoise. Even in the latter case, this is so only occasionally, for when an *ārya* emerges from meditative equipoise, [his or her] consciousness arises [again] tainted by the conditionings [of *avidyā*].[25]

We can say that, according to Tsongkhapa, even a simple occurrence of a conscious thought, such as our natural apprehension of 'I am,' contains layers of perspectives that are thoroughly deluded. We already saw this to be the case, at least according to Tsongkhapa, in our earlier treatment of the levels of selfhood.[26]

Let us now turn our attention to Tsongkhapa's own theory of persons. His could arguably be described as 'conventional realism' in that, although he rejects any concept of an underlying, unchanging self, the reality of many of our conventional notions of personal identity is preserved. Simply stated, Tsongkhapa asserts that the intentional object (*dmigs pa*) of our instinctual sense of self, or I, must be accepted as the person, the self. In *GR* Tsongkhapa writes:

> As far as our innate grasping at self – the view of the transitory collection – is concerned, the root text [*Madhyamakāvatāra*] has already rejected that the aggregates are its object. Furthermore, in the commentary [*Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*] it has been stated that the self that is designated in dependence

> [upon the aggregates] is the object [of this grasping]. Given this, we should maintain that the object of our innate I-consciousness is the mere person – i.e., the mere I – which is the focus of our natural sense of self.[27]

Tsongkhapa asserts that this 'mere I' (*nga tsam*), in addition to being the person (*gang zag*), should also be accepted as the self (*bdag*)![28] Such a self or person cannot be an entity that is independent of the aggregates, for our inborn clinging to self-identity does not conceive such an autonomous self. Yet it cannot be identical with the aggregates either (whether individually or collectively), for in our innate conceptions we tend to perceive the self as the possessor of these aggregates. (See chapter 3.) Therefore, in the final analysis, when we search for the true referent of our concept of self, we discover that it is neither independent from nor identical with our physical and mental aggregates. Thus, we can conclude that the person or self is a mere construct, albeit one based on our conception of the physical and mental constituents that together constitute our existence. Tsongkhapa often uses the terms 'self' (*bdag*) and 'person' (*gang zag*) interchangeably. This might appear, at first glance, as somewhat crude and as possibly reflecting a lack of sensitivity to the general Buddhist mistrust of the term 'self.' However, this conflation of the two terms seems to be quite deliberate. I think it is done to emphasise the crucial importance of appreciating the distinction between the conventional and ultimate perspectives when dealing with questions of self and persons. From the perspective of the absolute nature of things, the concepts of both self and person are untenable. Yet, from the conventional perspective of the everyday world, not only do persons exist, but even the self can also be said to exist!

Thus, the key to understanding the nature of personal identity lies in exploring what Tsongkhapa conceives to be the nominal nature of personhood. In other words, we must now unpack Tsongkhapa's oft-repeated expression 'person is a mere construct [existing] in dependence upon the aggregates.'[29] This calls for an analysis of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka nominalism that will involve, perhaps most importantly, an examination of the relationship between what Tsongkhapa calls 'designation' (*bdags chos*) and 'designative basis' (*bdags gdzi*).[30] This theory is closely related to the Nāgārjunian analysis of the concept of agency referred to briefly in chapter 3.[31]

In what sense, according to Tsongkhapa, are the individual's physical and mental aggregates the basis of the designation 'person'? According to Tsongkhapa, the relationship between the designative base and the designation with respect to the person is best described in terms of the process of what he (following Nāgārjuna's terminology) calls 'appropriation' (*nye bar len pa*; Skt. *upādāna*). According to this view, the physical and mental states of the person are the designative bases, whereas the person is the designation. How do the physical and mental aggregates serve as the basis for such designation? Let us take the simple case of the eye organ. What does it mean to say that the eye organ is 'appropriated' by the person? Tsongkhapa responds to this in the following manner:

> 'In that case,' one might ask, 'what is the meaning of the statement that the person appropriates [the act of] looking?'
>
> [Answer:] When the eye organ becomes the instrument that makes the person a looker (or seer), the person is said to have appropriated the visual faculty. At that instant, the person is simultaneous to the visual faculty and, thus, can be said to be prior to other faculties such as the auditory faculty and so on. One can extend this understanding to other factors as well.[32]

In the above, Tsongkhapa is suggesting that when a person engages in the act of looking at an object, it is the eye organ that actually makes it possible to 'see' the object. So in a sense, it is the eye organ that makes the individual a 'looker,' i.e., an agent. As a consequence, the act of seeing gives rise to the instinctual thought 'I am seeing.' This demonstrates how the I-consciousness can arise naturally in reliance upon the eye organ. Similarly, it is natural for us to have the thought 'I am injured' when, strictly speaking, it is our hand that is injured. This natural process of identification is what Tsongkhapa means by 'appropriation.' The same can be applied to all our other aggregates. For example, from our own personal experience we know that we often tend to identify strongly with our feelings. Thoughts such as 'I am ecstatic' or 'I am depressed' occur naturally in us. The process is also true of cognitions. Thoughts like 'I know,' 'I recognize,' and so on are part of our everyday experiences of being a conscious human being. As a basis on which I-consciousness thoughts arise, among all the five aggregates perhaps the aggregate of mental formations (*saṃskāra skandha*)

requires an understanding of greater complexity. The Tibetan term *'du byed* (pronounced *dü je*), like its Sanskrit counterpart *saṃskāra*, has a strong connotation of *creating* or *constructing* something. As Steven Collins points out, the term *saṃskāra* connotes both the act of creating and the created result as well.[33] Thus, *saṃskāra* is probably the most inclusive of the five aggregates. It embraces not only all of our motivational factors, including our emotions, but also our concepts of time, space, and continuity that are so crucial to our perception of ourselves and the physical world.

In brief, if we examine the nature of every single instance of the thought 'I am,' we find that it occurs only in reliance upon one of our aggregates or a composite of more than one. All thoughts such as 'I am going,' 'I shall eat,' 'I am ecstatic,' 'I am unhappy,' 'I am cold,' 'I thought about so and so,' 'I remember,' and so on inevitably relate either to a physical or a mental state of ourselves. In other words, there is nothing in our experience to suggest that our I-consciousness can arise in a total vacuum or without any context. Tsongkhapa seems to suggest that the status of the aggregates as a designative basis is not an objective one. It is not only relative to the designation, but more importantly, there is an element of temporal relativity as well. Generally speaking, we have no problem with the relative nature of such identities as 'president,' 'prime minister,' 'cook,' 'plumber,' and so on, which are so obviously contingent upon the nature of their corresponding jobs. Yet, underlying all of this must be a presupposed unity that is the object of our natural sense of self or I-consciousness. This is what Tsongkhapa is suggesting.

As can be seen from the above, these analyses draw heavily from the fundamental Madhyamaka principle of dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). Although the principle of dependent origination is common to all schools of Buddhism, its interpretation differs substantially from school to school. According to Tsongkhapa, a unique feature of the Prāsaṅgika understanding of this principle is the concept of 'mutual dependence' (*phan tshun bltos grub*) in that, in the final analysis, one's understanding of the principle of dependent origination must coincide with one's insight into the emptiness of intrinsic being.[34] Let us now explore this concept of mutual dependence and examine how it relates to our discussion on personal identity.

As argued earlier, for Tsongkhapa the person is designated in reliance upon his or her aggregates. Hence, the person is the

designation, and the aggregates are the designative basis. There is a mutual dependence between the two: the concept of one cannot be coherent without the other. In the texts, examples of such conventionally codependent pairs like tall and short, this side and the other side, are used to bring into profile the mutuality of all phenomena.[35] Of course, we have no difficulty in accepting the extreme relativity of concepts of comparative heights or directional positions. Perhaps the most well-known example of mutual dependence is that of fire and fuel.[36] In this example, Nāgārjuna argues that fire is neither independent of nor identical with the fuel. If fire were independent of fuel, then it would be possible to have a fire without fuel. In that case, the fire would burn eternally, which would mean that the effort of lighting a fire would be pointless. This, in turn, implies that there would be no act of burning at all for there would be nothing to act upon. If, on the other hand, fire were identical with fuel, then there would be a conflation of the agent and its object of action. The subject and the object, the consumer and the consumed, would become one.[37] We can see this in our everyday language when we say 'Fire burns fuel' – there is a recognition of fire as the agent and fuel as that which is acted upon.

Tsongkhapa, in his analysis of the theory of mutual dependence, seems to suggest that only by accepting a reciprocal relationship can we account for the mutual dependence of fire and fuel. Of course, all other Buddhist schools accept that fire depends on fuel, for the fire is an effect of the fuel. However, their metaphysics of causality does not allow them to accept a reverse relationship. In other words, according to Buddhist essentialists, fuel does not depend upon fire, for in their view, causal dependence is necessarily one directional. According to Tsongkhapa, the Prāsaṅgika rejects such a restricted notion of relation.[38] Using the example of fire and fuel, Tsongkhapa enumerates a long list of mutually dependent pairs such as 'cause and effect,' 'subject and object,' 'observer and observed,' 'parts and whole,' 'entity and properties,' 'definition and definiens,' and so on.[39] He argues that this thoroughly relational way of viewing things can be applied to the entire realm of existence.[40]

The question arises whether the theory of mutual dependence should be understood purely in terms of a mutuality of concepts, or whether one can make a stronger claim for the inclusion of material dependence as well. A mutuality of concepts is something that even Buddhist essentialists can espouse without much

philosophical difficulty; Tsongkhapa, however, suggests a mutuality in terms of both concepts and material existence. For example, in *RG* he writes:

> When that [intrinsic existence of cause and effects] is negated, their existence in terms of dependent origination of mutuality is affirmed. Valid cognition and its objects also share this nature. Therefore, it is not the case that I reject the validity of the existence of a mutually dependent cognition and its object. This applies also to the question of a thesis and its proof, for [insofar as mutual dependence is concerned,] there is no difference in their status. All such facts as cause and effect and so on are mutually dependent not only in terms of their concepts, but in objective terms as well. This, then, is the import of the treatise [*MMK*, 10:13b]. For the context here is to negate the intrinsic existence of all transactions [such as cause and effect] both with respect to language and to the objective world on the grounds that they are mutually dependent.[41]

In the above, Tsongkhapa argues that fire exists in dependence upon smoke in that the capacity to produce smoke is an integral quality of fire as an entity. He also suggests that the very identity of fire as fire is dependent upon the existence of smoke. The implication is that the both the existence and identity of fire can only be coherently understood not just within the context of a wider framework embracing the causal relationship between fire and smoke, but also and more importantly within the overall matrix of relationship within which the existence of things and events makes sense to our perceptions. This, however, does not entail that Tsongkhapa adheres to a form of rationalism whereby every aspect of reality is perceived to be capable of explanation. I agree with Ruegg when he suggests that there is an element of causal indeterminism in Nāgārjuna's theory of dependent origination. Ruegg sees this even more clearly in Candrakīrti's reading of the theory.[42] Ruegg's claim is based on the observation that according to Nāgārjuna, whatever phenomenon, or *dharma*, originates in dependence on another is neither identical with nor different from it. It might be said, therefore, that this level is both unamenable to ontological construction and remains antinomic.[43]

Does Tsongkhapa accept a similar notion of causal indeterminism, too? As this question pertains to Tsongkhapa's views on Prāsaṅgika

nominalist ontology, I shall deal with this question in the next chapter. The crucial point here is that for Tsongkhapa, and for the Prāsaṅgikas too for that matter, dependent origination does not signify a simple, linear, one-directional movement from a cause to an effect. It is a doctrine that negates substantial reality, or intrinsic existence, insofar as it is a principle of mutual dependence and mutual cooperation. Only through such a perspective can we account for the high degree of coherence that we experience in our pre-philosophical, conventional worldview. Certainly, if we are to argue that the concept of mutual dependence is a uniquely Prāsaṅgika view, something like Tsongkhapa's reading appears to be unavoidable.

To sum up, we find that, according to Tsongkhapa, the person can neither be identified as any of the physical or mental aggregates, such as consciousness, nor can it be identified with the mere continuum of the aggregates. Conversely, it cannot be identified as something distinct from these constituents. The personal identity of an individual can only be what our conventional beliefs allow it to be, namely, that unity which is presupposed when we speak about the history of an individual's life. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that for Tsongkhapa, the concept of personal identity is too fundamental to be analysed in terms of any other concept or concepts. He suggests that it is a basic presupposition without which we cannot really make sense of our perceptions of the world, nor of our own existence.[44] However, this does not imply that Tsongkhapa believes in the existence of a 'real' entity called the self that is unitary and unanalysable as Western proponents of the thesis of unanalysability appear to assert. This would go directly against Tsongkhapa's basic premise, as presented in chapter 3 – namely, that no concept of intrinsic being is tenable. To reiterate, Tsongkhapa's person is that which is presupposed when we attribute certain actions and characteristics to an individual, yet that presupposed unity remains a nominal construct. (We shall deal with Tsongkhapa's theory of nominalism in the next chapter.) Thus, in the final analysis, we are still left with the suggestion that the person is the intentional object of his or her inborn, naturally arising I-consciousness. It now becomes apparent that if we are to understand Tsongkhapa's somewhat peculiar views on personal identity, it is vital that we fully understand the nature of our natural sense of self, or I-consciousness. It is to an examination of this sense of selfhood that we must now turn our attention.

The nature of the I-consciousness

One of the fundamental premises of Tsongkhapa's thought, and in fact, of Buddhist philosophy as a whole, is that an individual's sense of self, or I-consciousness, is innate. It is instinctual and natural. It is neither linguistic nor even conceptual, if by conceptual one presupposes self-awareness. It is a natural, reflexive consciousness, almost like an underlying sense of one's own existence. For Tsongkhapa, this fundamental, natural I-consciousness relates to a unity of character that transcends any particular momentary stage of existence. And the object of this consciousness is the I that underlies all our natural intuitive senses of self when we say, 'I think,' 'I was there,' 'I went to such and such place,' 'So and so told me this,' and so on. Tsongkhapa calls this the 'mere I' (*nga tsam*) to indicate that it is not confined to any specific space and time. Tsongkhapa first develops this idea of the mere I as a generality unconfined by individual temporal stages in his *Ocean of Reasoning*. He writes:

> The self that is the focus of Devadatta's instinctual sense 'I am' when not thinking of a specific temporal stage [of his existence] is the mere I that is within him since beginningless time. The individual selves [of Devadatta] when he appropriated the body of a celestial being and so on are only instances of the former [mere I]. Therefore, when an I-consciousness arises in Devadatta focusing specifically on a particular form of existence [e.g., as a human], the object of his I-consciousness is a particular instance of Devadatta's self.[45]

Further on, Tsongkhapa elaborates on what he means by the mere I that is said to be present through the successive lives of an individual. As a conventional realist, Tsongkhapa appeals to an intuition that is fundamental to our common sense notion of ourselves. He writes:

> In the same way, regarding future lives, although the person of this life does not go into the next life, a mere I that is the object of our instinctual thought 'I am' does reach there [i.e., the next life] as well. Therefore, it is valid that out of fear of suffering in our next life, we strive here to discard evil deeds that are the causes and endeavour in virtuous deeds in order to attain happiness. This is analogous to the following example.

> Although [strictly speaking] today's person is no more tomorrow, out of fear that one might suffer through thirst and hunger tomorrow, one saves food and drinks today. Similarly, in order not to suffer in old age one accumulates wealth when one is young. In all of these situations, [people] do not make distinctions between the self of this time or that time. Rather, these endeavours are motivated by the simple wish for the self in general to be happy and overcome suffering. And since the self as a generality does pervade all temporal stages [of a person's existence], these acts also cannot be said to be deluded.[46]

The question now is 'How do we know that such an I exists?' Tsongkhapa draws extensively from our conventional, natural intuitions about our own identities. The key to understanding the nature of this identity is to analyse our faculty of memory and the process of identification that is involved in such experience. For example, we find that the more we can extend the process of recollection into the past, the greater the scope of the I-consciousness for identification. In the case of highly evolved individuals who are believed to be capable of recalling their previous lives, their natural I-consciousness will inevitably have, according to this view, a much greater reach. To make this point, Tsongkhapa often quotes from the scripture where the Buddha is reported to have stated, 'At such a time, during such a period I was King Māndhatṛ.'[47]

By invoking the process of recollection, Tsongkhapa is making what I believe is a valid claim that remembering an experience invariably involves the occurrence of the I-consciousness. In other words, he is suggesting that recollection necessarily occurs from a first-person perspective. Even when I remember, say, John McInroe winning the Wimbledon title for the last time in 1985, my actual memory is that of either my having seen it on television or having read it in the paper, or something of the sort. It remains a memory from a first-person perspective. Furthermore, according to Tsongkhapa, the object of this first-person, or I-consciousness, perspective that is associated with the experience of recollection is the mere I, which is not specific to any particular stage of the person's history. One might feel that when a person – for instance, a middle-aged golfer – remembers having smoked marijuana in his teenage years, it is actually the teenager that is the object of his I-consciousness. This, according to Tsongkhapa, is a mistaken belief. Such a view

reflects a deep ignorance concerning the experience of recollection. Thus, Tsongkhapa writes:

> One might think thus: 'Granted that the Devadatta of this life may have memories of being born in this or that realm in his past lives, still one need not accept that such memories are valid. For if they are, this entails that the Devadatta of this life existed in his previous lives. This, in turn, would imply that Devadatta is eternal.'
>
> This is certainly an objection that derives from an ignorance of how memory occurs. For example, in a debate, when one party previously held that, for example, sound is permanent, and later forgets his thesis and accepts that it is impermanent, the person may be reminded of the contradiction by his opponent. At that point, the guilty party will have the thought, 'Yes, I did subscribe to the view that sound is permanent.' However, the recollection does not proceed in terms of the thought, 'I, who exists now at this point in time, maintained in some remote past that sound is permanent.' Because of this, it is possible to point out the contradiction. If this were not so, we could not demonstrate any contradiction in a person's view, for the person who held earlier that sound is permanent did not maintain that it is impermanent later![48]

Why does Tsongkhapa insist that it is the mere I – the generality of an individual's personal identity – that is the primary object of the I-consciousness that naturally occurs in an experience of recollection? Although Tsongkhapa does not anticipate this question explicitly, it is not difficult to guess what his response would be. He would argue that any form of genuine recollection takes place only as a natural, spontaneous process. Therefore, the I-consciousness involved in such recollection cannot be something that is consciously and cognitively constructed; rather, it must invariably be an innate sense of I. And the object of this I-consciousness is, as argued before, the mere generality of the sense 'I am' that we experience at the most fundamental level of existence.

Given the above line of reasoning, one might accept the thesis that an understanding of the workings of memory leads to a better appreciation of the nature of our I-consciousness. However, a question can still be raised: How, if there is no unified, continuing self, is memory possible at all?[49] Tsongkhapa is

familiar with two distinct lines of response to the above question. The first is the theory of memory found in the writings of the logical-epistemological schools of Dharmakīrti and Dignāga. The second is the Prāsaṅgikas' nominalist account of memory as articulated by Candrakīrti and Śāntideva. In the first view, recollection occurs because of the presence of a unique cognitive faculty of apperception, known as 'self-cognizing awareness' (*svasaṃvedanā*), that is believed to be inherent in all of us. According to this theory, whenever a cognitive event occurs in us, it is, to use Matilal's language, *reflexively* aware of itself. As Matilal points out, according to this theory there is a 'self-luminous character to all mental events, beginning from human passion to the Buddha's compassion.'[50] Moreover, it is this aspect of self-awareness that makes it possible for us to remember things later. According to the proponents of this theory, there is a necessary causal relationship between this apperceptive faculty and the subsequent memory of an experience. For example, when we have a perception of a blue flower, at that very instant there is a dual perceptual process taking place: the perception of the blue object on the one hand, and a further awareness, what can be called a second-order cognition on the other, namely, the awareness of the experience itself. It is because of this second-order cognitive activity that when we later remember the blue flower, we actually recollect the experience of seeing it as well. These theorists argue, in fact, that a recollection of an object invariably occurs with the recollection of its experience.[51]

The key objection of those Buddhist epistemologists who assert a self-cognizing faculty of consciousness to those who do not so assert is that not asserting a self-cognizer leads to an epistemological conundrum. They argue that if there is no second-order cognitive activity at the time of a perceptual experience of an external event or object, then there is nothing to verify that the perception actually took place. If, on the other hand, it is asserted that this second-order cognition – the cognition of the perception itself – takes place since there is a separate continuum of consciousness that is aware of the experience, then these epistemologists argue that this faculty too must be cognized by another consciousness, and that one cognized by still another consciousness, and on and on, *ad infinitum*. This problem is resolved, they maintain, if we posit an apperceptive quality to all mental events that is integral to the perceptions themselves.

I shall not go into the details of Tsongkhapa's critique of the concept of a self-cognizing awareness.[52] Suffice it here to say that he categorically rejects it. Tsongkhapa's central objection is that positing such a faculty is tantamount to resuscitating the ghost of *svabhāva*, i.e., intrinsic being, which he has vehemently argued against. In the final analysis, *svasaṃvedanā* remains another metaphysical postulate whose purpose is to provide a firm grounding for a substantially real world of consciousness. This, according to Tsongkhapa, is nothing but an attempt to absolutize consciousness.[53] Following other Prāsaṅgika authors, Tsongkhapa also criticises this concept on the grounds of conceptual incoherence. He argues that just as fire does not burn itself, a lamp does not light itself, and a blade does not cut itself, the idea of an awareness illuminating itself is incoherent. Tsongkhapa quotes the following verse from the *Lankāvatārasūtra*:

> Just as the blade of a sword cannot cut itself,
> and just as a fingernail cannot touch itself,
> so too is it true of one's mind.[54]

This argument is also invoked in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (9:18). Tsongkhapa, in *GR* also cites Jñānagarbha's objection that an acceptance of a self-cognizing consciousness, like the Sautrāntika's concept of an indivisible atom, is nothing but an assertion with no evidence to support it.[55]

What, then, is Tsongkhapa's own explanation for the phenomenon of memory? Needless to say, Tsongkhapa attempts to present a coherent account of memory that does not invoke any essentialist metaphysical concepts. His is a nominal account based on an appreciation of our conventional beliefs concerning the phenomena of memory and recollection. Tsongkhapa is less concerned with the question of why memory occurs than with the practical question of how it occurs. Given his basic standpoint as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika that he does not dispute the conventions of the world, Tsongkhapa seems to take it as fact that memory *does* occur. According to him, any attempt to theorize beyond the phenomenal facts of the actual experience of memory inevitably leads to hypostatizing the phenomenon. In other words, it leads to a restoration of belief in the intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) of things. He rejects the inference that because our memory of an object invariably arises with the memory of its subjective experience, both subject and object must be cognized at the time of the actual

perception. According to Tsongkhapa, the invariability of subjective and objective components in our recollection has to do with the actual nature of memory itself.[56] For, as argued earlier, memory necessarily occurs from a first-person perspective. Thus, although Tsongkhapa accepts the general premise that there can be no memory without a prior cognition, he rejects the stricter claim that without a prior cognition of the very object (or subject) there cannot be a memory of it.[57] Tsongkhapa cites the memorable analogy that Śāntideva gives in the ninth chapter of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. This is the story of how hibernating animals are said to be able to 'remember' being bitten by rats when they feel the pain in the spring although the bite itself took place in the winter when they were hibernating.[58]

Tsongkhapa's own account of how memory occurs appears to be rather pragmatic.[59] He suggests that there are two principal reasons or causes for our experience of memory. First, both the person who remembers and the person whose experience or action is being remembered share the same timeline of a single continuum (*rgyud gcig*) of physical and mental aggregates.[60] That is, they are one and the same. Second, the memory experience and its antecedent, the perception itself, also share the same intentional object.[61] This is not to say that person *A* at *t2* perceives exactly the same object that was perceived by person *A* at *t1*, for in a strict temporal sense, the object of person *A* at *t1* no longer exists at the time of person *A* at *t2*. Tsongkhapa is saying that, in the conventional sense, the objects of the two mental events can be said to be the same. For example, if the memory is that of seeing an elephant when you were ten, even though the memory may be occurring at the age of thirty, the two mental events can be said to relate to the same object – the elephant. This is all that is implied by the conventions of the everyday world when we say that so-and-so remembers seeing such and such. Beyond this, the world does not posit a substantially real entity that can be considered to be present both at the time of perception and of its subsequent memory experience. Tsongkhapa makes the following concluding observation:

> Although we say, '[I saw] this Jhampa,' in actual fact, when we utter the above [sentence], we do not specify by thinking that I saw Jhampa of this particular time and at that particular place. We refer to Jhampa as [if he were] a mere generality. We can infer this simply by observing our own thoughts.[62]

Given that Tsongkhapa attributes a crucial role to memory in explaining the nature of our instinctual I-consciousness and its object, the mere I, does this not render his theory open to all the criticisms of a memory-based theory of personal identity? Furthermore, what happens in the case of a person who is clearly experiencing a false memory of having won the Wimbledon title in 1996, for example? I do not think that Tsongkhapa is vulnerable to these objections. First, Tsongkhapa's use of memory to account for our identities appears to be very different from those Western philosophers who have used memory as a *criterion* of personal identity.[63] Certainly, Tsongkhapa is not making the claim that person *A* at *t1* is equal to person *A* at *t2* if, and only if, *A* at *t2* remembers *A* at *t1*. Nor is Tsongkhapa making the claim that all cases of memory experiences are veridical by default. It is conceivable that I may falsely 'remember' that I have been to China when, in fact, I have never set foot on Chinese soil.

Of course, one could argue that in such cases, what is being experienced is not real memory, even though it is labelled as memory. But then the dispute becomes a matter of mere semantics. Whether we accept the possibility of false memories or not, this does not affect Tsongkhapa's views. I do not think that Tsongkhapa's position implies an acceptance of the incorrigibility of first-person accounts. Instead, Tsongkhapa is saying that whenever someone remembers an experience, that person always does so from a first-person perspective. That is to say, those actions and events being remembered are automatically ascribed to that person, the 'viewer' of the memory. And these experiences always accompany the natural occurrence of an I-consciousness. It is this mere I, unspecified in terms of any relative, temporal stages of the individual's existence, to which the events and actions are being ascribed. Hence, even in the case of false memories, the I being ascribed to the remembered events still remains the object of the person's instinctual sense of self. Thus, according to Tsongkhapa, when the middle-aged golfer remembers smoking when he was eighteen, he is not ascribing the I of the middle-aged person, which is temporally specific, to the teenager's action. He is ascribing to his actions a general sense of I, which embraces the temporal stages of both the teenager and the middle-aged golfer. Second, unlike the proponents of memory-based criteria of personal identity, Tsongkhapa does not assume the existence of something substantially 'real' that can be said to extend across time, which would thereby

provide the link between the different stages of the person's existence.

From our analysis so far, two things become clear. First, an understanding of the nature of the mere I, the mere generality of an individual's sense of self, holds the key if we are to make any real sense of Tsongkhapa's views on personal identity. Second, given that Tsongkhapa often invokes our conventional beliefs in validating his philosophical perspectives on personal identity, it becomes crucial for us to develop a clear notion of what Tsongkhapa means by 'valid conventional beliefs.' As the second point pertains to the wider concerns of a theory of reality at large, I shall deal with it in the next chapter. Regarding the first point, there is the crucial question of how to distinguish between the 'general' and the 'particular' identities of a person? As we observed earlier, the mere generality is the I that extends to all three stages in time and yet is not identical with any individual state. It can also be called a nominal unity, that which is presupposed when attributing actions to an individual. On the basis of this I, we can speak of having come from a previous life and going on to a future one. Strictly speaking, to say 'This human being will go into a next life' is a contradiction in terms. Tsongkhapa argues that if the Devadatta of this life were to migrate into the next life, he would have to be eternal, for this would mean that Devadatta does not perish in every single moment as all other phenomena naturally do.[64] Such a view of personal continuity would contradict the basic Buddhist doctrine of momentariness (*anitya*). However, all conventions, such as 'The individual came into existence from a previous life,' 'He will be reborn in a future life,' and so on, can be *validly* ascribed to an individual on the basis of an idea of a mere generality, i.e., the mere I.

The personal identity that is based upon existence as a human being is not a mere generality in that it is specific to a particular stage of existence.[65] Clearly, this claim makes sense only within a framework where one supposes multiple lives in an individual's existence. For our purposes, however, it is not necessary to make this supposition. Thus, it may be more appropriate in our discussion on personal identity if we characterize the personal identity of an individual human being as a 'generality' and its various stages as 'particulars.' Furthermore, particular personal identities are, in this view, relative personal identities. It is quite reasonable simply to speak of relative personal identities within an

individual's life history. This specificity may arise from the relativity of time, status, career, birth, race, gender, or other factors. Because of this dual aspect of an individual's personal identity – the general and the particular – we can speak of a person's multiple identities. For example, an individual can be a human being, a man, a Tibetan, a monk, a scholar, and so on. All of these can obviously be objects of one and the same person's I-consciousness. Therefore, we can see that there is a high degree of flexibility reflected in these identities. Each identity is specific to a particular stage of an individual's personal history. Moreover, underlying them all is our general personal identity, which corresponds to our innate sense of self.[66] The object of this innate I-consciousness is the mere generality (*nga tsam*). Tsongkhapa argues that we should not mistake the person who constructs the thought 'I am' for the objects of that I-consciousness. In other words, the former is a particular instance of the latter, the mere I, which according to Tsongkhapa is a generality. Thus, he concludes:

> Therefore, one should not be mistaken by thinking that the human being who constructs the thought 'I am' and the self that is the basis of that thought are one and mutually inclusive. One must know that the human being [concerned] is only an instance of that self [i.e., the I generality].[67]

Given Tsongkhapa's radical nominalism concerning personal identity, in the final analysis does he not obliterate the distinction between self and I on the one hand, and our sense of self and I-consciousness on the other? This is a question that requires serious thought. To state the conclusion in advance, the answer is no. Because of Tsongkhapa's overall philosophical position, a degree of objectivity must be accorded even to the object of our I-consciousness. In other words, it cannot be the case that it is only our intuitive sense of self that remains. On several occasions, Tsongkhapa explicitly distinguishes between the I-consciousness on the one hand, and its object I on the other. For example, after arguing for the need to distinguish between the mere generality and the particular identities corresponding to various stages of a person's life, Tsongkhapa makes the following statement:

> Just as [in the case of] the object I, one should know that also [in the case of] consciousnesses apprehending that I there are those with general and particular modes of conceiving.[68]

Having said this, it still remains an open question whether Tsongkhapa, and for that matter the Prāsaṅgika school as a whole, can maintain a meaningful distinction between the I-consciousness and the mere I. In other words, given his fundamentally nominal conception of the self, can Tsongkhapa maintain a clear distinction between our natural sense of self on the one hand, and its supposed object, the self, on the other? This question takes us to the heart of Tsongkhapa's ontology. It also pertains to several other important philosophical questions, including the relationship between language and reality, the role of thought and imagination in constructing reality, what is left behind in the aftermath of deconstructing intrinsic existence and the identity of things, and so on. I shall deal with these issues in the next chapter. Suffice it here to reiterate the basic point that the object of our natural, intuitive sense of self is that which is presupposed when we ascribe actions and attributes to an individual. And this, according to Tsongkhapa, is the 'defined person,' for it is the object of our naturally occurring I-consciousness.

If, as Tsongkhapa suggests, the person is that object of one's innate thought 'I am' and thus is the mere I conceptualized in dependence upon the aggregates, does this not lead to solipsism? For example, if I am the mere I conceptualized by me in dependence upon my aggregates, then the mere I that is the object of my thought 'I am' will be different from the 'mere Jinpa' as conceptualized by my wife, for example. Thus, the mere I that is the object of my I-consciousness is different from the mere Jinpa as conceived by my wife. Similarly, the mere Jinpa as conceptualized by my friends will be different from the mere Jinpa as conceptualized by those who do not know me well, and so on. The question then arises as to which is the 'real me.' Is the real me only the mere I that is the object of my instinctual thought 'I am?' If this is so, how does Tsongkhapa avoid the problem of solipsism? Alternatively, is the real me the mere Jinpa conceptualized by my wife and those who know me well? Or is it the mere Jinpa conceptualized by those who do *not* know me well, since in their conception of me there is a degree of 'objective' detachment? Or am I, in some peculiar way, the sum total of all the different conceptualizations that take place in dependence upon my physical and mental aggregates?[69]

That Tsongkhapa does not address this problem of solipsism when articulating his constructive theory of persons appears to point

to a critical difference between his own discourse on personal identity and that of contemporary Western philosophy. On the whole, Tsongkhapa's discourse pertains to understanding the identity of person and its continuity from the first-person perspective – namely, how we experience our own existence and sense of selfhood. Tsongkhapa's endeavour has been to understand the occurrences of our instinctual thoughts of 'I am' and to explain many aspects of our personal identity – such as the unity and continuity of our experience, individuality, and so on – on the basis of this object of our I-consciousness. Furthermore, a key feature of this approach has been to account for these phenomenal facts of our existence without presupposing the presence of some enduring, unchanging, unitary entity, whether we call it soul, self, or *ātman*. In this sense, Tsongkhapa's approach to understanding our existence and identity may be described as primarily 'phenomenological.'

In contrast, in contemporary Western philosophical discourse on personal identity it is the perspective of the third person that is most important. The nearest to a comment on a third-person perspective on the self that we can find in Tsongkhapa's writings occurs in the context of his discussion on our memories of other people. Earlier we observed that, according to Tsongkhapa, when we say, 'I saw *this* Jhampa,' in actual fact, we do not qualify the identity of Jhampa with specific spatial and temporal facts. In other words, when we utter the above sentence, we do not do so with the thought 'I saw Jhampa of this particular time and at that particular time.' We refer to Jhampa, and quite rightly so, as a mere generality.[70] From this, we can certainly surmise that for Tsongkhapa questions about the 'real me' and the attendant problems of solipsism betray an essentialist assumption that there must be something intrinsically real behind our thoughts of 'I am' as well as other people's conceptualizations about us. To enquire as to which one is the *real me* (Is it the mere I conceptualized by myself? Is it the mere Jinpa as conceptualized by my wife? Is it the mere Jinpa as conceived by others? and so on) is to go beyond the bounds of conventional truth and to search for some kind of intrinsically real Jinpa. That being so, we can say that instead of resolving the problem of solipsism, Tsongkhapa's approach suggests a way of 'dissolving' the problem!

How should we characterize Tsongkhapa's theory of personal identity? Duerlinger suggests that Candrakīrti is a non-revisionist in his conception of personal identity in that he does not seek to excise

either the reductionist or the non-reductionist components of our conventional notions of ourselves.[71] To a degree, Tsongkhapa can also be seen as a non-revisionist. However, this does not entail that Tsongkhapa accepts the validity of all our pre-philosophical beliefs pertaining to our personal identities. To reiterate, according to Tsongkhapa, all our conventional beliefs are permeated, at least at a perceptual level, by a fundamental belief in a *svabhāva* nature, that is, the intrinsic existence of things and events. Moreover, to the extent that this is so, the process of generating insight into the way things really are will necessarily entail correcting our pre-analytic, intuitive thoughts about ourselves and the world.

Tsongkhapa asserts that there are three primary perspectives that an individual can have on any given object or an event. An individual may view his or her own self as (i) something enduring and possessing intrinsic nature, (ii) something that is ultimately unreal and lacking any kind of intrinsic existence, or (iii) something having mere existence without the previous two opposing ontological qualifications. In *LTC* Tsongkhapa writes:

> To explain in detail, there are three modes of apprehending the existence of something – for example, a sprout. One mode is to apprehend the sprout as existing by means of its intrinsic nature, thereby holding it as essentially real. Another is to hold that although the sprout does not exist by means of intrinsic nature, it does exist as an illusion. Then there is an apprehension of the sprout as a mere existence, unqualified as either essentially real or unreal.[72]

According to Tsongkhapa, ordinary people like ourselves who have not gained any insight into the ultimately empty nature of phenomena possess the first and the third perspectives.[73] Those who have cognized emptiness may possess all three perspectives, while the fully enlightened Buddhas are said to possess only the second perspective since there is no awareness in the mind of a fully enlightened being that is not directly informed by his or her direct insight into emptiness. The question now is whether these perspectives should best be seen as distinct strands of consciousness or as three distinct aspects of a composite sense of self. Tsongkhapa himself does not anticipate this point; however, the latter model is better suited to his argument. With this model, it is still possible to accord a high degree of validating authority to our natural, conventional notions of personal identity.

To the extent that some of our perceptions may actually apprehend objects of the world without grasping them as real or as possessing intrinsic existence, we can say that a portion of even ordinary people's perceptions of themselves and the world can be considered valid. From this, we can surmise that Tsongkhapa does not reject all instances of I-consciousness as delusory. There is a level of I-consciousness that is related to our identity in a manner that does not impose any imagined modes of being. The object of such a consciousness is known as the 'conventional self' (*tha snyad kyi bdag*).

Having identified the nature of the person according to Tsongkhapa, we must now account for the phenomenal facts of its continuity and individuality. We must consider the following questions: In what terms does Tsongkhapa understand the temporal continuity of the person? and What enables us to differentiate one person from another?

Individuality, continuity, and rebirth

Even though Tsongkhapa rejects what is alleged to be an invariable causal link between the supposed apperceptive faculty of consciousness and subsequent memories, he still entertains the following question.[74] Given that there is no intrinsically real and abiding self that connects an earlier perceptual experience and its subsequent recollection, does this mean that there is no logical contradiction in believing that John McInroe could have memories of the personal experiences of Jimmy Connor? This is a problem well anticipated by Vasubandhu in his chapter on 'Refutations of Selfhood' in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and hinted at by Candrakīrti in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*.[75] All three masters – Vasubandhu, Candrakīrti, and Tsongkhapa – invoke the concept of the individual's mental continuum (*rgyun*) to counter this problem. They all respond to this question by asserting that genuine memory can occur only within a single continuum of consciousness. This concept of continuum has deep roots in the earliest Buddhist writings. It is often described by the metaphor of a stream or river. Tsongkhapa gives a succinct yet comprehensive definition of what he understands by continuum (*rgyun*). He states:

> Like the continuum of a running stream, as it maintains a link through the relatedness of cause and effect, it abides

> uninterruptedly through birth and death leaving no gaps in between. It is a conditioned momentary event that appropriates [all] three temporal stages. Such a factor is called a continuum. The individual stages are not mere distinct points of preceding and succeeding instances with no gaps in between; rather, they form parts of the whole.[76]

A corollary to this concept of a continuum of consciousness is the view that an individual's consciousness occurs in distinct continuums. Tsongkhapa, on several occasions, cites the famous passage attributed to the Buddha, which states that 'the consciousness of sentient beings arises distinctly in single continuums.'[77] Although there is a divergence of opinion amongst interpreters as to what exactly is meant by singularity of continuum in this context, Tsongkhapa reads this to mean that at any given moment only a single continuum of one type of consciousness (*rnam shes rigs mthun*) arises.[78] That is to say, when a thought occurs (which according to Tsongkhapa is a mental consciousness), only a single continuum of thought can occur in any given moment. Similarly, when a visual perception occurs, only a single continuum can arise at that time. This does not entail in any way denying the multiplicity of thoughts that occur within us naturally, an experience that is so characteristic of our everyday life. It does imply that all these thoughts are not discrete, autonomous mental events, but instead are all various shades of the same spectrum of experience called consciousness.[79]

The question now is, What differentiates these distinct continuums? I think this question can have two different senses. In the causal sense, the question can mean, What is the causal origin of the distinct, individual continuums of consciousness? However, the question can also be read as demanding a philosophical theory of principles that can account for the distinctness of each mental continuum. This is not to say that the causal and philosophical accounts may not converge. From the causal point of view, strictly speaking there may be no full and complete rational explanation of the existence of individual continuums of consciousness. To seek such a definitive causal account, from Tsongkhapa's point of view, would be to succumb to our deeply ingrained metaphysical tendency towards reification that often manifests as a search for original causes. Tsongkhapa accepts the existence of distinct mental continuums as a phenomenal fact requiring no 'metaphysical'

proof. Despite this, there is, nevertheless, a 'conventional' explanation for the distinctness of each continuum, which is based on the pan-Indian doctrine of *karma*, the process of action and its effects. According to this view, each individual carries within him- or herself a repository of past actions and their imprints. These imprints can be broadly understood as a complex pattern of habits and tendencies that are created principally by our past deeds and thought processes. Since *karmic* deeds are committed by individuals with distinct motives, aims, and habitual patterns, each of these deeds has characteristics that are unique to the individual. Hence, to be an individual person is to be a unique moral agent. This idea of the individuality of moral agency is critical to all Indo-Tibetan ethico-religious systems of thought, for their fundamental objective is to establish a coherent soteriological system. And maintaining the distinctness of the continuum of an individual's consciousness is essential for this purpose.[80]

Notably, the proponents of the *ātman* theory tend to situate this '*karmic* matrix' within the context of the enduring, permanent entity of the *ātman*. In contrast, Buddhists on the whole may situate it within the context of a never-ending continuity of mental phenomena, such as a foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) or mental consciousness. It is this complex process of *karma* and its resultant habitual patterns that actually perpetuates the continuity of an individual's continued existence in the world. The phenomenological process of this continuity is described in Buddhist texts as the interlocking chain of the twelve links of dependent origination. Within this scheme, fundamental ignorance gives rise to volitional acts that in turn imprint the consciousness, and so on. Together, these three – ignorance, volition, and consciousness – propel the course of an individual's continued unenlightened existence. The process evolves even further with the arisal of hosts of emotions such as craving and grasping. In this context, craving is principally a thirst for existence. Therefore, according to Buddhism, the process of life as an unenlightened being is said to be a product of *karma* and delusions.[81]

Because the matrix of *karma* is situated within the continuum of a person's consciousness, according to many of the Buddhist essentialist schools, both the continuity and identity of an individual person are ultimately explained in terms of his or her consciousness. As mentioned earlier, according to these schools, it is ultimately consciousness that is the true referent of our first-

person pronoun 'I.' It is important to appreciate, however, that the consciousness that is being posited as the candidate of genuine personhood by the Buddhist essentialists is not just any state of consciousness. Instead, it is what can be described as a 'basic mind' underlying all cognitive and emotional experiences that appears to retain its continuum even during what would ordinarily be perceived as states devoid of consciousness, for example, during deep sleep or a coma. This basic mind is also understood to be the mental faculty present both at the moment of death and at the first moment of a new birth.[82] This basic mind has several key functions. First and foremost, it carries its continuity from one life to another. Second, it is also the basis for the *karmic* causal process. Third, it is the repository of all the *karmic* imprints, psychological and emotional tendencies, and deeply ingrained traits of the individual. The proponents of foundational consciousness maintain that only a neutral, non-cognitive mind like a foundational consciousness can fit the above requisites.

Tsongkhapa rejects the thesis that consciousness is the repository of *karmic* dispositions. In *GR* he writes:

> One might ask: 'Given that there must be a basis upon which the imprints are left, what is that basis?'
>
> [Answer:] Those who subscribe to the theory of a foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) maintain that the foundational consciousness is the location of the imprints, for it is the focus of our deluded mind grasping at the thought 'I am.' In the same way, this school [Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka] too holds that the very object of one's innate, mere I-consciousness is the basis upon which the [*karmic*] imprints are left.[83]

In fact, in the strict sense, Tsongkhapa seems to argue against the very need to posit such a repository at all. The mere I, which is the object of our instinctual I-consciousness, is the basis upon which *karmic* imprints are said to be carried from successive stages of an individual's personal life history.[84] In Tsongkhapa's view, it is enough to acknowledge that an individual possesses these tendencies. There is no need to look beyond this and to seek where and how these tendencies are located. To do so is, again, to succumb to a tendency towards reification. Therefore, all the doctrinal disputes concerning the continuity of *karmic* potentials during meditative equipoise when all deluded perceptions are

believed to have ceased are in some sense quite irrelevant.[85] These debates stem from the mistaken assumption that because there are *karmic* potentials, there must necessarily be a repository for them. It is significant that Tsongkhapa, in another context, treats this debate in a much more positive light. In *KK*, Tsongkhapa responds to this debate by concluding that it is ultimately the person's foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) that is the repository of *karmic* and other habitual imprints.[86] However, in that text, Tsongkhapa's main concern is to present faithfully the Cittamātra theory of mind rather than develop his own philosophy.

One critical challenge for Tsongkhapa was how he would be able to defend his above standpoint without going against one of the key premises in all Mahāyāna soteriology, namely, that the mind in its natural state is 'pure' (*rnam dag*) and 'luminous' (*gsal ba*). According to this view, all mental pollutants, the various afflictions of the mind – such as our negative emotions like anger, attachment, and so on – are adventitious (*glo bur ba*) characteristics. Though natural, they are not inseparable properties of the natural mind. This concept of the natural purity of consciousness is particularly developed as a systematic theory of mind in the Mahāyāna doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*, the theory of buddha-nature according to which all sentient beings possess, by virtue of their sentient nature, the germinal seed of enlightenment.[87] Tsongkhapa is quick to see the dangers posed by this doctrine for possible metaphysical reification. The danger is all the greater if one accepts a literal reading of some of the scriptures associated with the buddha-nature doctrine. In these scriptures, the *garbha* is sometimes described as a permanent, ever-pure, indivisible absolute entity. Tsongkhapa is extremely sensitive to any temptation to perceive buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) as some kind of absolute, primordial entity similar to an eternal soul. He vehemently argues that to subscribe to any notion of a substantial entity called an essence is equal to adhering to the non-Buddhist concept of *ātman*.[88] For Tsongkhapa, to adhere to such concepts is, as it were, to bring back the ghost of an eternal self through the back door!

Given Tsongkhapa's deep concerns to avoid postulating any absolute subjects, how *does* he understand the thesis of the natural purity of mind? We can definitely say the following of Tsongkhapa's understanding of the concept – that this purity should not be construed to suggest that in some remote past we were all pure and undefiled. For Tsongkhapa, the doctrine does not make any claim

that our mind or consciousness has ever been free of mental pollutants. It pertains more to a future possibility, a potential to be separated from the pollutants that obscures the mind's basic nature. Thus, through insight and a prolonged process of reorientation, it is possible to 'cleanse' our minds of all cognitive and emotional afflictions, including those latent tendencies towards negative behaviour. Accordingly, luminous does not entail a mind free of obscurations. Rather, it implies that these obscurations are not fundamental aspects of the mind's natural being. In other words, the pollutants have not penetrated into the basic nature of the mind.[89] In fact, following the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka school, Tsongkhapa defines this luminous nature (*gsal ba*) of mind in terms of the mind's emptiness of intrinsic existence.[90]

There is, however, a further interpretation of *tathāgatagarbha* to which Tsongkhapa subscribes as well. This is an understanding of *garbha* principally in the subjective terms of what is known in a genre of literature belonging to the Vajrayāna school as 'inner radiance' or 'clear light' (*'od gsal*, pronounced *ösel*). In this view, all cognitive experiences are perceived to be permeated by an underlying nature of mere luminosity. This is, if you like, the mind in its natural state of purity and clarity. Like waves in the ocean, all cognitive activities are said to come out of it and dissolve into it. In itself, it is said to be pure awareness with no specific object of apprehension. In fact, one could say that its cognitive content (if such a thing exists) is a mere absence. According to the literature, this inner radiance remains latent most of our lives while our minds are constantly occupied by sensory and conceptual activity. It only becomes fully manifest and, therefore, actively functioning at the point of death when all gross levels of consciousness have ceased to operate. Hence, it is said that a correspondence exists between the levels of our consciousness and the levels of our physiological states. In the literature, the latter is described in terms of *prāṇa* (vital energy) activity in the body. However, according to the texts, there are certain occasions in our lives when an individual can experience glimpses of this inner radiance, for example, during deep sleep, fainting, sneezing, and sexual climax.[91] Interestingly, these ideas seem to call for some form of returning to the purity of the original state of innocence (whatever that may be). For the mind in its natural state, free of conditionings of language and thought processes, is believed to be undefiled and pure. This is not the place to go into the details of this interesting theory of mind.

Our concern here is to see how it relates to Tsongkhapa's overall position on the question of personal identity.

Does an acceptance of this theory of the mind's inner radiance lead Tsongkhapa ultimately to posit an objective (or subjective) entity as the 'real' identity of the person? The answer is no. For Tsongkhapa the Vajarayāna doctrine of inner radiance only enriches an already refined concept of mind. There is no attempt here to resuscitate the ghost of a 'real person' or 'true self' in the guise of an ever-present inner entity. However, the theory *can* be said to expand the horizon of an individual's basis of designation for his or her own self. In other words, it broadens the scope of a person's natural, intuitive I-consciousness. It also gives greater explanatory power to the pan-Buddhist theory of rebirth. For Buddhists can now argue that continuity through successive lives is ensured through the uninterrupted continuum of this subtle mind of clear light. So, as far as the theory of personal identity is concerned, we are still left with Tsongkhapa's conventional realism.

Let us now summarise in brief the key elements of Tsongkhapa's account of personal identity discussed so far. This will allow us to proceed to the next major issue – the ontological status of the person. From our discussion, we can safely make the following broad points.

First, according to Tsongkhapa, personal identity is a fundamental presupposition underlying all our perceptions, thoughts, and linguistic ascriptions of actions, events, or characteristics to an individual. Moreover, in the final analysis, the notion of personal identity remains unanalysable. This is not to say that Tsongkhapa asserts the presence of something that is substantially real and eternal. The reality of both the identity and unity of this I is purely nominal. Through examination, we find that this nominal construct is, in fact, the object of our innate, natural sense of I-consciousness. I have suggested that an understanding of the nature and causal process of our memory experiences is vital to appreciating this I-consciousness.

And second, in Tsongkhapa's view, personal continuity is ensured by the continuity of the individual's mind/body complex. This personal continuity can be explained further in terms of the continuity of what Tsongkhapa calls our subtle consciousness. It is the distinctness of these continuums that accounts for the individuation of one person from another.

Now, before we move on to the ontological questions that pertain to the existence of persons, there is one important point to

be addressed: the role of metaphor in Tsongkhapa's discourse on the self and persons.

The analogy of the chariot

Steven Collins has persuasively argued for the need to appreciate the significant role that imagery plays in articulating the Buddhist doctrine of no-self. A brief glance at the principal Mahāyāna texts belonging to the *Perfection of Wisdom* (*Prajñāpāramitā*) scriptures also reveals the extent of the role that metaphors play in the development of what we might call an *aesthetic* sense of emptiness. To illustrate this point, both Tsongkhapa and Candrakīrti end every chapter in their expositions of Nāgārjuna's twenty-seven-chapter *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* with extensive quotations from the sūtras strewn with multiple similes. That many of these quotations are in poetic verse is not a mere coincidence. This poetic form draws our attention to the power of metaphor in eliciting the desired philosophical insights. Remember in chapter 2 we discussed the use of methods other than rational, philosophical argumentation.[92] Among Tsongkhapa's favourite quotations are many of the verses from *Samadhirājasūtra*. For example, the sūtra evokes the following imagery:

> Although due to singing, playing music, and crying
> sounds of echoes arise,
> the echoes do not reside in the sounds.
> Just so must you comprehend all phenomena.
>
> When a man who makes love in dream
> Awakens, he does not see his lover.
> Childishly, the lustful still clings to her.
> Just so must you comprehend all phenomena.
>
> The magician conjures images
> of horses, elephants, chariots, and so on,
> yet none are as real as they appear to you.
> Just so must you comprehend all phenomena.
>
> The eager woman who experiences a dream
> of both the birth and death of a son
> is joyful at the birth and saddened by the death.
> Just so must you comprehend all phenomena.[93]

In these verses, we see two key similes: dream objects and magical illusions. The verses also draw attention to how our confused mind grasps at the substantial reality of things although, in actual fact, things are empty of intrinsic existence. Finally, the sūtra makes the crucial point that *nothing* can be found to exist by means of intrinsic nature. Thus, all things are empty, and it is vital for us to comprehend this fundamental fact of their existence.

Of all the various images found in Indian Buddhist literature to describe the reality (or unreality) of persons, Tsongkhapa pays special attention to the chariot analogy.[94] Perhaps the earliest use of the chariot as an analogy to illustrate the nominal reality of persons can be found in a sūtra that Tsongkhapa cites on several occasions.[95] By giving this analogy a prominent position in his discourse on self and persons, Tsongkhapa is following the example of Candrakīrti. Predictably, both Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa employ the analogy primarily in its negative usage – as an illustration of how the whole, the chariot, cannot be either identical with or entirely separate from its parts. My main concern here, however, is to highlight the positive use of the metaphor. By this, I am referring to its application towards illustrating the nominal nature of persons.

Briefly stated, the negative use of the analogy is illustrated in terms of the following seven points:[96]

THE CHARIOT

(1) The chariot cannot be identical with its parts such as wheels, axle, spokes, etc.
(2) The chariot cannot be posited as something separate from its parts, for this would mean that the chariot is independent of its parts.
(3) The parts of the chariot do not exist intrinsically as the basis of the chariot.
(4) The chariot too does not exist intrinsically as dependent upon its parts.
(5) The chariot cannot be said to possess its parts.
(6) The chariot cannot be identical with the collection of its parts.
(7) The shape or configuration of the parts cannot be posited as the chariot.

THE SELF

(1) The self is not identical with the physical and mental aggregates.

(2) The self is not independent of the aggregates.
(3) The aggregates do not exist intrinsically as the basis of the self.
(4) The self does not exist intrinsically as dependent upon the aggregates.
(5) The self does not intrinsically possess the aggregates in the sense of some kind of 'inherence.'
(6) The collection of the aggregates cannot be posited as the self.
(7) The shape or configuration of the aggregates cannot be posited as the chariot.[97]

Does the above analogy lead to the reductionism of the self that has been so vehemently criticised by Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa themselves? In fact, Tsongkhapa himself raises the question as to whether or not the above seven-point analysis that deconstructs the relationship between the chariot and its parts does not constitute a denial of the chariot's existence.[98] Tsongkhapa responds to this objection by asserting that only an essentialist ontology would lead to such nihilism.[99] This is because it is the essentialists who seek to posit the existence and identity of things by thoroughly analysing their ultimate ontological status. Therefore, if the chariot cannot be found to exist when sought through such a probing analysis, for Buddhist essentialists this means that the chariot does not exist at all![100] There is no more thorough examination for seeking the intrinsic existence of the chariot than the seven-point analysis described above.[101] And as has been demonstrated conclusively by Tsongkhapa himself, the chariot cannot be found when sought through the seven-point analysis.

Obviously, Tsongkhapa himself does not believe that the seven-point deconstruction shown by the analogy actually points towards the non-existence of the chariot. Instead, it illustrates the total absence of intrinsic existence of the chariot. Tsongkhapa argues that the non-findability of the chariot when sought in these seven ways in no way repudiates the conventional existence of the chariot.[102] An acceptance of the chariot's existence is not arrived at through an analysis from the ultimate standpoint; rather, it is a matter of worldly convention. The existence and identity of the chariot must be understood solely within the context of conventional reality wherein an unobscured, worldly perception establishes its reality.[103] Thus, the existence and identity of the chariot are real in name and concept only and can be established solely in reliance upon the various parts that constitute the chariot.[104] Therefore, all

normal transactional propositions such as 'Fetch the chariot,' 'Repair this chariot,' 'Buy that chariot,' and so on remain valid as always.[105] The essential point is this. According to Tsongkhapa, worldly conventions can be regarded as valid because they are, to a large extent, taken for granted by their users. They should not be subjected to ultimate scrutiny, for they cannot withstand such a probe.

Tsongkhapa argues that the Prāsaṅgikas' position clearly establishes the conventional reality of the chariot in terms of what is already familiar to the world. The Prāsaṅgikas also accord a greater level of respect to the nature of mutual dependence that we perceive in things and events. For example, a chariot can be the referent of the conventions 'whole' (*yan lag can*) and 'collection' (*tshogs pa*) in relation to its various parts, just as the parts are valid referents of conventions like 'elements' (*yan lag*) and 'constituents' (*tshogs pa can*).[106] The chariot can also be called an 'agent' from the point of view of its function of appropriating its various parts to form a whole.[107] Within such an ontology, neither the whole nor the parts enjoy any privileged ontological status. Just as there is no intrinsically existing chariot, so there cannot exist wheels, axle, or nails that possess intrinsic natures. Similarly, just as the wheels, the axle, and so on exist conventionally, so too does the chariot. Hence, in Tsongkhapa's view, the nominal reality of the chariot brings into sharp focus the nominal reality of the person.

Tsongkhapa identifies three principal advantages to illustrating the nominal reality of person through the analogy of the chariot. First, this analysis enables us to easily reject eternalistic views that pertain to our conceptions of self and personhood. The reason for this is pragmatic. When the pattern of analysis is confined to an examination in terms of mere identity and difference, sometimes the process of reasoning can be too brief to be of great effect. Yet, when the reasoning becomes too elaborate, it can lead to other difficulties as well, such as a lack of clarity and precision. In contrast, the analogy's seven-point analysis presents a pattern of reasoning that is neither too succinct nor too elaborate.[108]

The second advantage is that it provides a better deterrent against falling into a nihilistic perspective. The explicit reference to the negation of intrinsic existence at the start of the reasoning process ensures a clear recognition of the scope of negation by reason from the very start. The line between what *is* to be negated and what is *not* to be negated is clearly defined. Despite the absence

of intrinsic being, the functionality of cause and effects is maintained.[109] In other words, this sevenfold scheme of analysis leaves the laws of causality and dependent origination intact.

The third advantage of the analogy, according to Tsongkhapa, is how its perusal can enable us to reflect upon the dual nature of all things and events. On the one hand, the deconstruction of the identity relation between the chariot and its parts leads to an ascertainment of the absence of intrinsic existence of the self or person. Yet, in the aftermath of such a realization, when we observe the indubitable validity of the conventional functions of the chariot, our conviction in the principle of dependent origination is deepened.[110] Tsongkhapa writes:

> ... and when you see that any of these seven [points] is open to those objections, you should repeatedly reinforce the ascertainment of the absence of intrinsic existence. For when the pervading definition [i.e., the seven points] is negated, you have for the first time also negated that which is pervaded [i.e., intrinsic existence itself]. Subsequent to this [insight], when you realize that the conventions associated with the chariot cannot be disputed, even though [the chariot] does not possess intrinsic existence, you will experience a sense of wonder... In this way, you will obtain conviction in the fact of their not coming into being by means of their intrinsic natures, which is the meaning of dependent origination, thinking, 'There is not the slightest trace of being that exists by means of its intrinsic nature.'[111]

This relates, as one can guess, to the famous (or infamous) Madhyamaka notion of the illusion-like nature (*sgyu ma lta bu*) of all phenomena. Tsongkhapa is implying here that an understanding of the chariot analogy will assist us in developing an easier appreciation of the Madhyamaka doctrine of phenomenal illusion.[112] Before we explore this theory in detail, it is important first to address the ontological question of the existence of persons.

We have now arrived at a critical juncture in our overall discussion of self and persons in Tsongkhapa's philosophy. In chapter 3, we explored all the various ways in which the self is said not to exist. We followed three key stages of Tsongkhapa's deconstruction of the concept of self. The outcome of this discussion was to arrive at the principal conclusion that the concept of a self that possesses some kind of essentialist, metaphysical ontology is

untenable. This is because any notions that entail a belief in intrinsic existence were also revealed to be untenable. In this chapter, we have addressed the question of how, without a substantially real self, we can still account for many of the phenomenal facts that appear to suggest the presence of an abiding self. As we explored and found answers to this question, Tsongkhapa's own theory of person revealed itself to us. I have suggested that Tsongkhapa's position is best characterized as conventional realism. We found that for Tsongkhapa, personal identity is a fundamental presupposition and is the object of our natural, innate I-consciousness. As we investigated Tsongkhapa's theory of self, we also dealt with the question of *who* or *what* the person is. We must now explore the final strand of our discussion, the question of the ontological status of the person. We have observed that Tsongkhapa upholds the conventional existence of persons. We must now address the following question: In what way do persons exist *conventionally*? This will take us to the heart of Tsongkhapa's nominalist ontology.

CHAPTER FIVE

No-Self, Truth, and the Middle Way

To exist is to exist in the conventional sense

Two things have become clear from our analysis of self and persons so far. First, persons do not exist by means of some intrinsic nature – that is, they do not possess intrinsic existence. In modern philosophical terminology, it can be said that persons are devoid of any absolute ontological status. They are, to use well-known Buddhist philosophical jargon, *prajñaptisat*,[1] real in name and concept only. As *prajñaptisat*, however, persons do possess certain existential status, and according to Tsongkhapa, that status can be made sense of only in terms of what he calls 'worldly convention.' Moreover, to say that something exists as a valid convention, according to Tsongkhapa, is to assert that it exists in accordance with our valid conventional beliefs about the world.[2] Thus, the key to understanding the ontological status of persons in Tsongkhapa's philosophy lies now in a thorough appreciation of his concept of conventional reality. This takes us to the second point. Given that Tsongkhapa categorically rejects the idea of intrinsic existence, he must be able to account for any degree of existence and reality that he accords to things and persons within the framework of a nominalistic ontology. It is clear that Tsongkhapa cannot have recourse to any pre-given, subject-free, objective criteria of existence.

It is vital first to situate Tsongkhapa's nominalism within the context of the general Madhyamaka discourse on the two truths (*satyadvaya*).[3] The Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit term *satya* is *bden pa*, which has a dual meaning. It can mean 'real' as in the

sense of talking about whether something is real or not in the world, or it can also mean 'truth' as when applied to propositions. Simply put, according to Tsongkhapa, the world of everyday experience constitutes conventional reality (*saṃvṛtisatya*), while its emptiness of intrinsic existence is ultimate reality (*paramārthasatya*). As a parallel, valid propositions pertaining to the first can be said to be conventional truths, while those that pertain to the second are ultimate truths.

The theory of two truths reflects a pan-Mahāyāna philosophical approach of perceiving reality in terms of the concept of two levels. Needless to say, behind the theory lies the assumption that there is an essential disparity between appearance and reality. Of course, this distinction between appearance and reality is as ancient as philosophy itself. Equally old are the epistemological attempts to reconcile (or, in the case of more radical approaches, resolve) the seeming contradictions between the two dimensions of appearance and reality. In fact, the whole of Indo-Tibetan philosophical discourse can be viewed as an attempt to resolve this paradox as well as to develop a coherent account of the relationship between them. Predictably, philosophers differ on the question of what exactly are appearance and reality. Specifically, some (the Vedāntas) say that appearances are *maya* (illusion), whereas reality is *Brahman*. Others (the Sautrāntikas) say that the apparent is *prajñāptisat* (thought constructs), while reality is the indivisible atoms. For still others (the Cittamātras), appearances are merely mental projections, and the real is absolute consciousness. And according to some early Tibetan thinkers, especially the Kagyü school, the apparent is the illusory world of multiplicity, while the real is their underlying inexpressible and indeterminate unity of oneness (*ro gcig*).

In contrast to these other views, for Tsongkhapa, the apparent is the everyday world of phenomenal beings, whereas the real is their emptiness of intrinsic existence.[4] Moreover, unlike these other views, for Tsongkhapa, the apparent does not equal illusion. Thus, the world of everyday reality is not an illusion; it is illusion-*like*. (I shall deal with Tsongkhapa's understanding of the nature of illusion in the next section.) This distinction is critical and has significant ramifications in many philosophical and doctrinal disputes between Tsongkhapa and earlier Tibetan thinkers.[5] Illusion is what our own unenlightened perception projects onto the world. This unenlightened perspective is the perception of

things as possessing some kind of intrinsic being when, in actuality, they are totally devoid of instrinsic reality. So, in a sense, there are two dimensions to 'appearance': (i) the surface level of everyday reality and (ii) the appearance of things to our perceptions as intrinsically real entities. Admittedly, these two aspects are indistinguishable to ordinary perception; in principle, however, they remain distinguishable. This is reminiscent of the point we observed earlier about the impossibility of distinguishing between existence and intrinsic existence prior to an actual deconstruction of intrinsic being.[6] For instance, Tsongkhapa would accept that the transcendent mind of the fully enlightened Buddhas perceives the world of appearance as it is, free of any delusory projections.

Perhaps the central problem of the theory of two truths is to understand the exact nature of the relationship between appearance and reality. If they are too distant, there is a danger of ontological bifurcation. In other words, appearance and reality become absolutized with an unbridgeable gulf between them. Yet, if they are too close, reality begins to lose any sense of significance. Therefore, unless a meaningful distinction can be maintained between appearance and reality, Tsongkhapa's ultimate (*paramārtha*) will not be able to fulfil its soteriological function – that is to say, Tsongkhapa's emptiness will not lead to true liberation (*mokṣa*).[7] As a result, Tsongkhapa insists on interpreting the two truths as dual aspects of one and the same world.[8] At the early stages of development of the theory of the two truths, Buddhist thinkers seem to have appreciated this difficulty. For example, *Saṃdhinirmocana*, one of the oldest Mahāyāna sūtras, warns against the pitfalls of both assimilation and bifurcation of the two truths.[9]

From a contemporary philosophical point of view, perhaps the problem lies in discerning whether the theory of two truths should be understood as epistemological or ontological. If we read this theory ontologically, there is the danger of accepting two distinct entities, one relative and the other supposedly absolute, with categorically distinct ontologies. Such a reading would directly go against the general Madhyamaka spirit of avoiding any tendency for reification. At the same time, a purely epistemological understanding appears to be flawed as well for it would signify that the Mādhyamikas have no philosophical theory of reality of their own. Furthermore, it would be hard to discern how the Mādhyamikas perceive themselves as upholding the basic Buddhist standpoint

that it is deep insight into the nature of reality – the way things really are – that liberates the mind. Short of admitting that they are fundamentally agnostic, the Mādhyamikas must explain the nature of the relationship between our perceptions and reality. Therefore, it must be shown that the doctrine of the two truths is not merely an epistemological device that has only pragmatic functions. As a result, Tsongkhapa endeavours to read the Prāsaṅgika's understanding of the theory of the two truths as both epistemological and ontological.

In articulating this important Madhyamaka theory, Tsongkhapa closely follows Candrakīrti's formulation of the two truths as two 'natures,' or 'aspects' (*ngo bo*), of one and the same entity.[10] For example, in *LTCh* Tsongkhapa states:

> Each of these inner or outer phenomena has two, two natures, namely, its ultimate nature and its conventional nature.[11]

These two aspects are those that are apprehended, respectively, by two distinct perspectives – the non-deluded perception of the *ārya*s and the deluded perceptions of the world.[12] Tsongkhapa rejects any suggestion that one and the same object – for example, a jar – is ultimately real (*paramārtha*) to an *ārya*, while it is only deceptively real (*saṃvṛti*) to an ordinary person. To think in this way, Tsongkhapa asserts, is deeply misleading. For Tsongkhapa, the jar is a conventional reality (*saṃvṛtisatya*) for both the *ārya* and the ordinary person, while the jar's emptiness of intrinsic existence is its ultimate reality.[13] In modern philosophical terminology, we can say that Tsongkhapa's reading of the Madhyamaka theory of two truths, though epistemological in character, has an ontological dimension as well. Thus, in Tsongkhapa's view, the ultimate (*paramārtha*) and the conventional, or relative (*saṃvṛti*), are not only apprehended by two distinct perspectives (*brnyed don*), but they are also two distinct dimensions (*ngo bo*) of one and the same world. We have already dealt with Tsongkhapa's understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, especially in terms of the negation of intrinsic existence. My concern here is to explore Tsongkhapa's theory of conventional reality and its relevance to his nominalist ontology.

For Tsongkhapa, there are at least two distinct senses to the term *saṃvṛti*. In *GR*, after citing a critical verse from the *Lankāvatārasūtra*[14] Tsongkhapa writes:

> The *saṃvṛti* referred to in the first line and referred to in the final two lines should not be regarded as being the same. This is because the first sense of *saṃvṛti* is the conventional level [reality] at which we accept things [and events] as coming into being and so on. In contrast, the second *saṃvṛti* is our apprehension of things as real, from which perspective things are conceived to be real.[15]

From the above, we learn that when *saṃvṛti* is contrasted with *paramārtha* in the context of understanding the ontological status of things and persons, *saṃvṛti* refers to a valid framework of conventional reality. In this context, one does not refer to or discuss 'aspects' of entities; rather, the discussion focuses on the existential status of things and persons.[16] However, *saṃvṛti* in the context of *saṃvṛtisatya* that is posited in direct contrast to *paramārthasatya* is our fundamental ignorance, our innate deluded apprehension that grasps at things and persons as real. Thus, from the perspective of a *saṃvṛti* view, things and persons are, of course, truly 'real' (*bden pa*) because such a consciousness both projects and subsequently apprehends an 'objective, intrinsic reality' in things and persons. In this way, our apprehending deluded consciousness becomes *saṃvṛti*, the veil that conceals and obscures the truly empty nature of things.[17] Thus, we have:

1. *saṃvṛti* as a convention – the valid framework within which language, concepts, logic, and conventions of the world operate.

2. *saṃvṛti* as an agent of obscuration – that which obscures the ultimately empty nature of things.

Corresponding to these two connotations of the term *saṃvṛti*, Tsongkhapa treats the concept of *saṃvṛti* from two different, but related, points of view. Tsongkhapa relates the first meaning to such existential terms as 'existence' (*yod pa*) or 'coming into being' (*grub pa*), while the second meaning involves the concept of 'truth' or 'reality' (*bden pa*).[18] We can say, perhaps, that the first sense pertains to issues of ontology and the second, of epistemology. Once this distinction is clearly drawn, a coherent taxonomy emerges. Existence consists of both conventional and ultimate realities. Emptiness, the mode of being of all things and events, is the ultimate, while all other phenomena, both transitory and

non-transitory, are conventional realities. However, emptiness cannot be said to exist in-and-of-itself, for this would mean that it is an absolute. (See chapter 2.) So, although emptiness is not a conventional reality, it nevertheless exists on the conventional level. This is because nothing exists as an absolute. Seen in this way, conventional existence equals existence. Thus, one can say that for Tsongkhapa, to exist is to exist in the conventional sense. This is not to say that Tsongkhapa believes that 'existence' and 'conventional existence' are logically or semantically identical. Tsongkhapa's conventional existence becomes existence only by means of conditioned, dependent origination.

It is important to note that Tsongkhapa also makes a distinction between what is real from the perspective of a deceptive, conventional truth and what is veridical from the perspective of an ordinary person.[19] The first sense refers, as explained before, to the deluded consciousness that apprehends all things as real. As we have seen, all phenomena other than emptiness fall into this category of the 'real' (*bden pa*). The second sense allows us to distinguish a further level of reality, or 'truth,' within the overall framework of relative reality. This twofold distinction allows the Prāsaṅgika to accommodate within his ontology what appears to be an indisputable existential difference between the reality of objects like jars and pillars on the one hand, and illusory phenomena like mirages, mirror images, echoes, double moons, and so on, on the other. This is something that is accepted even within the normal conventions of the world. In drawing attention to this distinction Tsongkhapa writes:

> According to the Prāsaṅgika standpoint, it is maintained that there are the six [deluded] consciousnesses that are tainted by temporary delusory conditions, and there are the six consciousnesses that are the contrary. [In addition] there are the six objects as perceived by the first six consciousnesses and the six objects of the latter six consciousnesses. Of these, the deluded perceptions and their objects can be posited as 'false conventions,' while the six undeluded consciousnesses and their objects can be accepted as 'veridical conventions.'[20]

Tsongkhapa makes clear that this subdivision within conventional reality is something that the Prāsaṅgikas themselves do not accept within their own ontology.[21] According to them, and for that matter for Tsongkhapa as well, all conventional realities are deceptive, in

the final analysis. Thus, a distinction that accords to some phenomena a substantially real existential status cannot be tenable. Something that is real (*yang dag*) cannot be deceptive (*log pa*) at the same time. Hence, the above distinction can be maintained as merely provisional and is valid only from the perspective of ordinary worldly perception. Thus, Tsongkhapa writes:

> It is only from the perspective of the [ordinary] world that the objects of the conventional world perceived by the six undeluded consciousnesses are said to be veridical and their opposites, false. This is because the truth or falsity of these perceptions can be determined by worldly cognition. From the *ārya*'s perspective, however, there is no such distinction. Just as no forms can be found [in the mirror] in reality as it appears, things such as a blue [flower] do not exist by means of self-defining characteristics, although they appear to do so for those who have fundamental ignorance (*avidyā*). Therefore, insofar as whether or not they are deluded, there is no difference [at all] between the two perceptions.[22]

We must now confront the following questions: What does it mean to say that persons exist conventionally, that is, in accordance with worldly convention? What is the criterion of a valid conventional existence? What degree of substantial existential status is accorded to the everyday world by Tsongkhapa? What degree of objectivity is accorded to things and persons within Tsongkhapa's nominalist ontology?

These questions clearly pertain to the fundamental questions of ontology in Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka philosophy. Although advocating an avowedly nominalistic ontology, Tsongkhapa appears to be clear about the dangers of falling into radical nominalism. For example, while commenting on the frequent occurrence of expressions such as 'mere name' (*ming tsam*), 'mere expressions' (*tha snyad tsam*), and 'mere concepts' (*brda tsam*) in the scriptures, Tsongkhapa reminds us that by these expressions the Buddha is not rejecting the existence of non-linguistic things nor is he repudiating genuine knowledge of their referents. For example, in *LN*, Tsongkhapa states:

> The significance of [the expression] 'mere name' is that, as suggested earlier, when one searches for the underlying [intrinsically] real referent, one does not find it. [Therefore,]

> it is not the case that there are only words but no referents; nor is it the case that there are no non-linguistic things.[23]

So, Tsongkhapa is suggesting that this operator 'mere' (*tsam*) negates only the existence of intrinsic being of persons and things to which names and expressions refer. Tsongkhapa is not asserting that nothing exists outside our language and thought patterns. He is not saying that the object *jar* is nothing more than its linguistic counterpart 'jar.' So what *is* this jar, and in what sense can we say that it exists?

Before we proceed any further, I think it is crucial to recognize a feature that is so characteristic of Mādhyamika thinkers, including, of course, Tsongkhapa. This is a peculiar philosophical bent of mind they all share when dealing with ontological issues. Unlike many other philosophers, the Mādhyamikas' ontological concern does not appear to lie with the question (to use a well-known Quinian expression) *What* is there? Rather, their concern seems to be with the question, In *what sense* is there? This is because for the Mādhyamikas the question What is there? is an empirical one that can be settled according to the consensual criteria of evidence and validation.[24] Of course, this attitude is in accordance with the fundamental Prāsaṅgika claim that they do not dispute the conventions of the world.[25] This reflects strongly the Mādhyamikas' deep antipathy towards essentialist metaphysics and their preference for a more empirically and pragmatically oriented approach in philosophy. Therefore, according to Tsongkhapa, metaphysical postulates such as *ātman*, *brahman*, eternal *dharma*s, indivisible atoms, *ālaya* consciousness, *svasaṃvedanā* (self-cognizing awareness), and so on are all unnecessary phantom additions to the repertoire of existing things and events. Because of their essentialist metaphysical nature, according to Tsongkhapa, if these entities were to exist, they would possess a categorically distinct ontological status. This is because if they existed, they would have to do so as absolutes. But as we have seen, any notion of absolute is untenable from Tsongkhapa's point of view.

So the question is this: Given that existence equals conventional existence, what are the criteria of a valid conventional existence? In other words, How do we determine that something is conventionally real as opposed to non-real? Since Tsongkhapa does not dispute the conventions of the world on questions of what exists and what does not, it appears, at least on the surface, that the criterion of

conventional existence is simply whether or not the said convention accords with the perspectives of the world. On analysis, we find that Tsongkhapa has a broad understanding of what is meant by a convention (*tha snyad*) being in accordance with worldly perspectives. For instance, Tsongkhapa accepts that the perception of a snake, which may arise from seeing a coiled rope in dim light, can be said to be in accordance with a worldly perspective. Tsongkhapa's calls such perceptions 'that which is familiar or known to the conventions of the world.'[26] His point is that such perceptual illusions are common occurrences and form an integral part of our everyday interactions with the world. Seen in this way, worldly convention becomes equivalent to something that is capable of being experienced or taken as an intentional object (*dmigs yul*) of consciousness.[27] In contrast, many philosophers' metaphysical postulates cannot be said to accord with the perspectives of the world. This, then, is at least one criterion of a valid conventional reality.

As we have seen, however, this criterion alone is not adequate, for Tsongkhapa must be able to distinguish between the ontological status of a real snake and a coiled rope perceived as a snake. So what further criterion is required? Predictably, Tsongkhapa's second criterion directly addresses this problem. According to Tsongkhapa, in order for something to be accepted as conventionally real, not only must the convention be 'known' to the world, it must also not be contradicted by another nominally valid cognition. For instance, in *LTC* Tsongkhapa writes:

> For example, when one has the thought 'There is a snake here' upon seeing a coiled rope, or 'There is water' upon seeing a mirage, such apprehensions take place within a cognition that does not probe into the [ultimate] mode of being of things. Nevertheless, the reality as apprehended by these thoughts is invalidated by other valid conventional [cognitions], hence, such things do not exist even conventionally.[28]

A subsequent realization of the coiled rope as not a snake when seen in brighter light automatically repudiates the validity of the previous perception. In contrast, the perception of snake based on a real snake is not open to such invalidation. Although both these perceptions are equal in having intentional objects that are in agreement with known perspectives of the world, one of them lacks grounding in valid experience, while the other does not.[29]

Tsongkhapa adds still another criterion. He asserts that such a convention must also not be invalidated (*gnod pa*) by any analysis pertaining to the ultimate ontological status of things.[30] By including this third criterion, Tsongkhapa wishes to demonstrate that metaphysical postulates such as *ātman*, *ālaya*, eternal *dharmas*, and so on cannot be accepted as conventionally existent, for these metaphysical categories are incapable of withstanding ultimate analysis. Yet, if they possessed real existence, they would certainly be findable when searched for through critical analysis. Here again we see the overwhelming importance of Tsongkhapa's methodological distinction between the parameters of the two types of analysis as developed in chapter 2.

Thus, Tsongkhapa presents his criteria of conventional existence as follows:

> One might wonder, 'By what means does one determine whether something is to be accepted or rejected as conventionally existent?'
>
> [Answer:] (i) That it is familiar to conventional cognition; (ii) that the convention thus known is not invalidated by some other valid conventional knowledge; and (iii) that the convention thus known must not be invalidated by reasoning that thoroughly probes into the way things [really] are – i.e., enquires as to whether or not something exists by means of its intrinsic nature. Those that fulfil these [three criteria] are accepted as conventionally existent, while those that fail to do so are accepted as being non-existent [even] conventionally.[31]

Perhaps one might object to the third criterion on the grounds that, according to Tsongkhapa himself, since no phenomena can withstand ultimate analysis, persons too can be seen as repudiated by analyses pertaining to the ultimate nature. Here, it is vital to recall Tsongkhapa's logical distinction between that which is 'not found' when sought through critical reasoning and that which is 'found not to exist.'[32] The fact that persons are unfindable when sought through ultimate analysis does not entail that they are *negated* by such critical reasoning. Persons, being conventional realities, lie beyond the scope of ultimate analysis to negate or affirm. Therefore, the *inability* to withstand ultimate analysis is not the same as being *negated* by such an analysis.

Tsongkhapa's insistence on the need to develop a systematic and coherent understanding of the world of conventional reality has been an object of much criticism in Tibet. Taktsang Lotsawa considered Tsongkhapa to be giving too much credence to the validity of worldly convention and thus to be reifying the everyday world of experience. He accuses Tsongkhapa of believing in what he calls 'validly grounded convention' or 'conventions established by valid cognition' (*tha snyad tshad grub*).[33] Subsequent critics of Geluk Madhyamaka, notably the twentieth-century Geluk thinker Gendün Chöphel, have also used this term.[34] It is difficult to discern what is meant exactly by 'validly grounded convention,' and whether all critics of Tsongkhapa who use this term understand the same thing by it. To some extent, I agree with Ngagwang Palden (b. 1797) when he asserts that many of the arguments of Tsongkhapa's critics are based on reading too much into Tsongkhapa's attempt to maintain a coherent notion of validity at the level of the phenomenal beings of everyday experience. According to Ngagwang Palden, these critics impose an essentialist reading on Tsongkhapa's concept of validation.[35] Having said this, I do think, however, that the dispute brings into relief a serious philosophical difference between Tsongkhapa and his critics. For Tsongkhapa, as shown earlier, the conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and the ultimate (*paramārtha*) are not two distinct entities with a categorically different ontological status. Rather, they are two aspects of one and the same world. There is only one world, the lived-in world of our everyday experience. This, however, is not the case with Tsongkhapa's critics. For them, the world of *saṃvṛti* is a world of illusion, which has no place within the perspective of an enlightened mind. At the stage of full enlightenment, the only perception that remains is that of emptiness. Like a mirage that disappears when approached, the perceptions of the multiple world of *saṃvṛti* are said to dissolve at enlightenment. Because of this, conventional reality cannot be accorded any established existential status. According to Tsongkhapa, however, '... it is necessary to accept a mode of being (*gnas lugs*) that is dependently originated, without essence, like a reflection.'[36] Therefore, for Tsongkhapa, the rejection of this mode of being is not only logically incoherent, it is also spiritually dangerous, for it constitutes nihilism.[37]

To recapitulate, we can now say that in Tsongkhapa's nominalist ontology persons exist as valid conventions. Their existential status

accords with the valid conventions of the world. The issue for us now is to understand the meaning of 'valid convention' and in what sense the existence of persons accords *with* such a convention. In other words, what is this 'conventional knowledge' which is said to give validity to the reality of everyday objects? In response, Tsongkhapa writes:

> 'Conventional knowledge' refers to those types of cognitions that engage with their objects, whatever they may be, as they appear to the mind. They do not enquire into the facts about whether what is perceived exists as only as it appears to the mind, or whether it really objectively exists in such a manner. Thus, they are those [awarenesses] that engage [their objects] without analysis. Such types of cognitions are called 'non-analytic mind.' It is not the case, however, that they do not engage in any analysis whatsoever.[38]

In the above, Tsongkhapa suggests that 'non-analysis' here does not preclude conventional analysis, such as enquiring whether a jar is breakable, whether Tenzin goes to market, and so on. Clearly, even within such types of discourse, there is a difference between truth and falsity. As mentioned earlier, a visual perception of a face is veridical while the perceptual illusion of seeing a mirror reflection of a face is not. Thus, Tsongkhapa contrasts the perspective of a non-analytic mind with the ultimate standpoint. Earlier, we encountered Tsongkhapa's contention that the world exists at the level of unexamined, natural awareness.[39] Tsongkhapa sometimes characterizes this perspective as that of a 'natural, innate mind' (*blo lhan skyes*).[40] With this assertion, Tsongkhapa is not suggesting that the final authority on the question of what exists and what does not lies with the mind of a philosophically illiterate person. In order words, he does not mean that whatever such a person deems to be real is real, and vice versa! He is clear that this non-analytic mind can also be found in philosophers as well. For Tsongkhapa, an appreciation of this point is critical. Thus, in *LTC* he writes:

> Therefore, it is not the case that when identifying worldly convention we should consult only an elderly person who has no philosophical training. It is sufficient to look at the mode of engagement of the non-analytic minds of both parties involved in a philosophical disputation. Moreover, that which

is known to such a [non-analytic] mind are those [things] that are capable of being the basis for such designations as perception, experience, [and so on].[41]

It is, however, not adequate for Tsongkhapa's valid convention to be merely a natural cognitive event. It must be what he calls an 'undamaged' (*gnod med*) cognition as well, 'damage' here referring to cases of perceptual or cognitive illusions. Thus, to say that persons exist is now to say that persons are objects of undamaged, conventionally valid cognitions. Still, this cannot be all there is to Tsongkhapa's nominalism of persons, for even the Buddhist essentialists accept this. A word of caution is called for here. From our analysis so far, if we conclude that Tsongkhapa's ontology gives priority to epistemology in the sense that existence is grounded in perception, we will be making a serious error. In Tsongkhapa's view, just as in the case of fire and fuel, or self and aggregates, object and its perception are mutually dependent. One does not exist prior to the other, nor does one enjoy greater ontological status than the other. Objects exist in relation to perceptions, while cognitions exist in relation to their objects. For Tsongkhapa, the idea of a content-free consciousness is conceptually incoherent.[42] Therefore, the crux of the matter lies in understanding the expression 'existence in accordance with the world.'

Tsongkhapa reminds us that in our everyday language, existence has a primarily transactional value. When we talk of bean shoots growing in the field, we mean only that the shoots are protruding from the ground in the field. We do not analyse whether the sprouts have come from a cause that is identical with them or from something that is independent of the seeds and so on.[43] Nor does our lack of such enquiry obstruct us from making full use of the knowledge of the shoot's growth in the field. Similarly, when we say, 'Tenzin is walking,' we do not analyse the act of walking in terms of whether or not the lifting of his right leg constitutes walking, and so on. Just as we make the simple observation that Tenzin is walking, so too, Tenzin as an agent of the act is not posited through an analysis into *who* or *what* the 'real' Tenzin is. We see that fire burns, and without having any metaphysical concept of what 'real fire' is, we cook food with fire; also, we know that putting our hand in the fire is not a good idea. In brief, in our everyday interactions with the world, we relate to persons and things through mere names and concepts and engage

in effective actions with respect to them. Therefore, the conventions of the world do not posit any ontological status over and above the existence of things as understood at the level of everyday language.

Similarly, the Prāsaṅgika too does not posit anything more than 'what there is.' In a memorable passage in *LN*, Tsongkhapa draws our attention to what he sees as an irony in the tenets of the Svātrantika-Madhyamaka school. He writes:

> [Your standpoint] differs significantly from the manner in which the world posits the referents of conventions. And although you assert that [things] exist in accordance with worldly convention, this is a mere claim, for you do not accept the actual meaning.[44]

According to Tsongkhapa, to say that things exist conventionally is to say that they exist in accordance with the conventions of the world. There cannot be any proof of the conventional existence of persons outside the framework of everyday language. Propositions such as, 'I was at yesterday's lecture,' 'I see this beautiful painting,' 'I am in pain,' 'I am thinking,' 'Tenzin saw me at the market this morning,' and so on constitute what we can roughly call 'proofs' of the conventional existence of myself as a person. In fact, according to Tsongkhapa, to expect something more than this as proof of our existence is to fall prey to the temptation of reifying existence.

Tsongkhapa appears to suggest that although our appreciation of the reality of things and persons does not require proof since it is apparent to us, having knowledge of their *nominal* existence (*tha snyad du yod pa*) *does* require prior cognition of their essential emptiness.[45] And for this, of course, critical reasoning is vital. For unless all traces of intrinsic existence of the object under investigation are deconstructed, the object's nominal reality cannot be established. There is a sense that the establishment of the nominal nature of things and persons comes only as a by-product of an overall negation of the intrinsic reality of things and persons. This seems to be almost a logical requisite of the cognitive process. In *LN* Tsongkhapa makes the following critical statement:

> Of the two [modes of being] – objects [in and of themselves] and [by means of] conventions – if things do not exist by objective intrinsic natures, then it would be automatically established that they exist due to conventions [alone].[46]

This suggests that for Tsongkhapa, at a rational level, conventional existence can only be established through a process that is, in essence, an inference by means of elimination. He is suggesting that the existence of things and persons can only be posited in terms of either an objective, intrinsic reference (*don*), or language (*ming*). And once it has been clearly demonstrated through a process of critical reasoning that intrinsic referentiality is untenable with respect to the existential status of things, the only conclusion we can reach is that existence can be said to be only nominal. It is interesting that Tsongkhapa does not make this point in *LTC* despite the extensive treatment he gives to understanding the criteria of conventional existence. Perhaps it was only later, when he came to write *LN*, that the full significance of the impossibility of developing a complete rational account of conventional existence dawned upon Tsongkhapa. However, as to the question, Of what exactly does this nominal reality consist?, there does not seem to be any clear rational account. In this regard, we find an element of incompleteness here, which may possibly be related with the fundamental problem of language in describing reality.

This may be, perhaps, that to which Matilal refers when he says that according to Nāgārjuna, there can be no complete theory of the phenomenal world.[47] This resonates with what David Ruegg refers to as 'causal indeterminism' in Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's understanding of the world of dependent origination as was mentioned in chapter 3.[48] Can we also ascribe this sense of phenomenal incompleteness to Tsongkhapa? In chapter 2, we considered a possible paradox in Madhyamaka ontology whereby one experiences a profound gulf between the ultimately empty nature of things on the one hand, and the reality of their existence and functionality on the other. We also observed that for Tsongkhapa, reconciliation of these perspectives is the most difficult task of the Mādhyamika aspirant. Perhaps this is an acknowledgement of the causal indeterminism and phenomenological incompleteness that Matilal and Ruegg perceive in the Prāsaṅgika's nominalist ontology.

Everyday reality as fiction-like

There still remains one area of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought that may shed additional light on his nominalism. This is

the notion that the phenomenal world is illusion-like (*sgyu ma lta bu*). It has emerged from our examination of Madhyamaka nominalist ontology that according to Tsongkhapa, there is a clearly discernible degree of fictionality to persons as far as their existential status is concerned. Persons are, to use his own words, 'illusion-like.'[49] The central point of comparison between persons and illusory objects is simple: like a magician's illusion, persons appear to be 'real' while in actual fact they are 'empty' of their own being. There is an apparent inconsistency at the heart of an illusory object. It appears in one way, yet exists in a contrary way. Tsongkhapa calls this essential characteristic of illusion 'the discord between appearance and reality' (*snang gnas mi mtun pa*) and suggests that this cannot be characteristic of 'real' entities, which possess intrinsic being.[50] Tsongkhapa argues that there is a real sense in which persons are fictional as well in that they possess this contradiction at the heart of their existence. In fact, according to Tsongkhapa, all objects of everyday reality are similarly fictional. Matilal describes this feature of Madhyamaka thought as the 'pan-fictional view.'[51] Earlier, we observed that Madhyamaka writings abound with metaphors such as mirages, echoes, mirror images, bubbles, reflections of the moon in water, hallucinatory ghost towns, etc. to underline this illusion-like nature of all things.[52] Of all such metaphors of illusion Tsongkhapa's preferred choice appears to be the case of a mistaken perception of a snake that arises under certain circumstances on the basis of seeing a coiled rope.[53] There is nothing on the part of the rope, either as a composite object or in the way it is coiled, that can support the existence of a snake. Yet, due to multiple factors – such as the way the rope is coiled, the dim light, our natural propensity for a fear of snakes, and so on – a genuine perception of a snake can occur. Furthermore, the fear that grips the person from this perception is real and capable of motivating him or her to act spontaneously, that is, to either fight or flee.

In describing the fictional character of everyday world phenomena, including persons, Tsongkhapa gives two interpretations of the phrase 'illusion-like.' He writes:

> Two meanings of illusion are taught [in the scriptures]. For instance, when ultimate truth (*paramārtha satya*) is said to be illusion-like, this is meant in the sense that although something is affirmed as mere existence, its intrinsic reality is

> negated. [In contrast,] when [visible] forms and so on are said to be illusions, it is meant in the sense that although they are devoid of intrinsic natures, they [still] appear as forms and so on. Of these two, here [i.e., in the context of describing persons as illusion-like] it is meant in the second sense.[54]

By drawing the above distinction Tsongkhapa is underlining the fact that 'existence only' is not the same as intrinsic existence. Tsongkhapa is suggesting that by understanding the first sense of the illusion-like character of things, existence is not directly seen as 'real,' but appears as a fiction in which all essential being is negated. The second meaning of 'illusion-like' pertains to the level of appearance, i.e., our everyday perceptions of the world. This relates to the fact that though all phenomena such as tables, chairs, and so on are devoid of intrinsic being, they continue to appear as objects of our consciousness. Therefore, when the phenomenal beings of the everyday world of dependent origination are proven devoid of intrinsic existence, they are perceived as illusion-like in a more positive sense.

Tsongkhapa gives the analogy of magical illusion to illustrate his point that despite being empty and devoid of intrinsic existence, beings do appear in the world. He argues that it is only through the combination of two separate cognitive events that one can infer the phantom nature of a magician's illusion. On the one hand, the person must first have the visual perception of seeing, for example, the conjured animals, such as a horse or an elephant. It is, however, a further cognitive faculty, namely, a reflective insight, that reasons and knows that what appears to the eyesight does not actually exist. In other words, a subsequent cognition, a mental consciousness, apprehends that no horses or elephants exist where the image of a horse or an elephant appears. Thus, only through a combination of visual perception and reflective insight is one able to establish the truly illusory character of the magical play. Thus, Tsongkhapa writes:

> For example, a visual perception sees the conjured images of horses and elephants, and a subsequent mental cognition ascertains the non-existence of the horses and elephants as imagined. In this way, one develops the knowledge that the perception of horses and elephants is an illusion, or a false perception.[55]

Similarly, argues Tsongkhapa, it is through the combination of our normal, indubitable experience of things and persons on the one hand, and the full comprehension by reflective insight of their essence-free nature – that is, their lack of intrinsic being – on the other, that an awareness of the person as illusion-like finally dawns.[56] This is why the understanding of the second sense of illusion-like is said to contain an understanding of the first sense as well.

This dual interpretation of the meaning of illusion-like character seems to point towards two critical roles that the Madhyamaka pan-fictional view must play in its ontology. First and foremost, it must demonstrate the absence of any vestiges of essential being with regard to the existential status of all things including persons. This, of course, points towards the principal assertion in the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka that all things are devoid of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity. Secondly, and from our point of view more significantly, an understanding of the illusion-like character of phenomena has a more positive role to play within Madhyamaka ontology. It allows us to reengage in the world of dependent origination. Tsongkhapa is suggesting that worldly, conventional being is able to be established *precisely because* it is essence-free and empty of intrinsic existence![57]

The question now is, How is functionality possible in a fictional world? Or alternatively, Don't 'real' trees grow from seeds? Similarly, one could ask, Doesn't drinking water quench thirst? Or, Doesn't one feel pain when hit with a stick? Perhaps it would be useful here to invoke what Crittendon calls the function of an 'operator' in discourse.[58] Crittendon, in his articulation of the pan-fictional view in Madhyamaka, relates the theory to our concept of a fictional character like Sherlock Holmes. Once we have established the fact that when talking about Sherlock Holmes we are talking about a fiction, we can then engage in discourse within which all linguistic and logical principles that pertain to the values of truth and falsity can be fully applied. For example, given our set of assumptions relating to Sherlock Holmes, we can make a meaningful distinction between the truth or falsity of the following two sentences: 'Sherlock Holmes is a Tibetan who lives in Lhasa,' and 'Sherlock Holmes is an Englishman who lives in London.' The operator here is the critical qualification, 'The story says that . . .' – that is, the assumption that our discourse is taking place within the fictional world created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In the context

of our conventional world of phenomenal beings the operator would be 'within the framework of worldly convention.' Of course, this relates once again to Tsongkhapa's cardinal distinction between the domain of two types of analysis as developed in chapter 2.

A similar approach to the above can be found also in the ninth chapter of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra.* In response to the charge that in denying the intrinsic existence of things the Prāsaṅgika is defying the reality of the conventional world, Śāntideva argues that within the essence-free world of emptiness, all conventional functionality can be coherently maintained.[59] He cites the analogy of a fictional world where killing a person can be coherently maintained as a negative act. In Śāntideva's own words, 'killing a fictional person accrues fictional *karmas*.'[60] So, according to Tsongkhapa, we can safely surmise that as far as the applicability of semantic and logical principles is concerned, there is no difference between the world of fiction and that of actual living beings. Just as true and valid propositions can be made concerning the actual world, so can valid propositions be made relating to the fictional world. The principal difference between the two, however, lies in their existential commitments. Even true, valid propositions of fiction do not entail existential commitments. The proposition that Sherlock Holmes smokes pipe does not commit the speaker to accepting the existence of Sherlock Holmes in the real world. To carry the analogy further, Tsongkhapa would argue that propositions concerning facts of everyday experience, like, 'I see Cheme walking,' or 'This apple was grown on that tree,' and so on, though making valid claims, do not bind the speaker to any ontological commitments. The acceptance of intrinsic beings or essence – or, to use the Madhyamaka parlance, the *svabhāva* nature of things – is (as we observed in chapter 2) a further step that can come about only through philosophical reflection that occurs subsequent to our everyday discourse, which takes place at the level of the world of phenomenal beings.

Inevitably, the Madhyamaka pan-fictional view raises questions of possible parallelism in epistemology. Given that all phenomena are illusion-like, are all perceptions hallucination-like too? Does Tsongkhapa contend that all our perceptions of the phenomenal world are illusory in some profound sense? If so, does this mean that Tsongkhapa rejects any possibility of genuine knowledge other than knowledge of the ultimate? These questions pertain to the critical issue of epistemology (or the denial of it) in the Prāsaṅgika-

Madhyamaka and Tsongkhapa's reading of Candrakīrti on theories of knowledge. Space prevents me from entering into a detailed analysis of Tsongkhapa's Prāsaṅgika epistemology.[61] Suffice it to note here that Tsongkhapa does not reject knowledge in general, nor does he believe that knowledge is possible only in the realm of the ultimate. For him, our conventional knowledge that there is water in the jar is a case of true cognition (*pramāṇa*) for it is veridical (*mi slu ba*) within the framework of worldly convention.[62] Such a perception is categorically different from an illusion of seeing water in a mirage. The former can lead to an effective fulfilment of a desire, namely, to quench our thirst. In contrast, the latter can only lead to disillusionment. Thus, a coherent, objective distinction can be maintained between instances of genuine knowledge and instances of illusion within the world of everyday experience. This is not to say, however, that such worldly perceptions are veridical in an absolute sense. They are veridical only in a relative sense, for they pertain only to the phenomenal being of the objects perceived. Visual perception of a jar can relate only to the phenomenal reality of the jar and can never attain its final being, i.e., the jar's emptiness of intrinsic existence.

Just as we found that there exists a meaningful difference between the two levels of reality, so there exists a fundamental difference between conventional knowledge and knowledge of the ultimate. From the ultimate standpoint, only a cognition of emptiness is genuine knowledge. Worldly conventions and knowledge cannot attain the ultimate dimension of phenomena. To use Candrakīrti's words, 'Worldly perceptions are not always veridical.'[63] Similarly, knowledge pertaining to the ultimate cannot attain the realm of the conventional. This is analogous to Tsongkhapa's methodological distinction between the domains of conventional and ultimate discourse. For Tsongkhapa, an ultimately illusory perception like seeing water is appropriate in attaining an illusion-like object such as water. Such perceptions are, however, not appropriate in attaining a referent that is real in the ultimate sense. Thus Tsongkhapa concludes that

> Because of this the Mādhyamikas accept these [perceptions] to be deceptive. Nevertheless, this does not contradict them positing objects that are 'unreal.' If 'real' entities are being posited, it is then contradictory to maintain that subjects, which are [themselves] deceptive, affirm their reality.[64]

Note the similarity of the above view with Śāntideva's assertion concerning the ethical question of killing a fictional person.

Unlike some Tibetan thinkers, Tsongkhapa does not reject the possibility of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*). So, the crucial question for Tsongkhapa is, If the notion of intrinsic existence is untenable, does it not follow that the idea of valid means to knowledge is also untenable? Isn't Nāgārjuna right in making the symmetrical claim: 'If there are no objects of knowledge (*prameya*), how can there be valid means to knowledge (*pramāṇa*)?'[65] In other words, How can Tsongkhapa reconcile his somewhat realist epistemology with a nominalistic ontology? Wouldn't epistemological scepticism be more in accord with Tsongkhapa's metaphysics (or the rejection of it)? These questions certainly point to serious philosophical challenges for Tsongkhapa's thought. I have already addressed some of these issues in chapter 2 with respect to the status of logical principles within Tsongkhapa's overall philosophical system. I shall content myself here by making two brief observations.

First and foremost, I think it is important to appreciate the subtlety in Tsongkhapa's standpoint *vis-à-vis* an epistemological theory of knowledge. Certainly, there is an element of realism in Tsongkhapa's concept of knowledge. Yet it must be noted that the realism is relative to a framework that is, in itself, ultimately a construct. Just as the propositions pertaining to Sherlock Holmes are verifiable within the framework of the world of fiction so is Tsongkhapa's knowledge is veridical only within the limited framework of our everyday transactional, conventional world. In the ultimate sense, all such knowledge remains provisional. So if Tsongkhapa's epistemology can be characterized as realism at all, it must be regarded as such with an important qualification, that is to say, as 'conventional realism.' This, of course, fares well with our characterization of Tsongkhapa's theory of personal identity.[66]

The second observation I would like to make is that, in Tsongkhapa's view, all commentators on Prasangika-Madhyamaka who insist on a categorical rejection of a valid means to knowledge (*pramāṇa*) are suffering from the perennial fault of conflating the perspectives of the ultimate and the conventional, i.e., the absolute and the relative. According to Tsongkhapa, not only does the Prāsaṅgika accept the possibility of genuine knowledge, he also accepts four valid means to knowledge. Citing Candrakīrti as his source, Tsongkhapa argues that the Prāsaṅgika accepts: (1) perceptual knowledge (*mngon sum*); (2) inferential knowledge

(*rjes dpag*); (3) testimonial knowledge (*lung gi tsahd ma*); and finally, (4) analogical knowledge (*dpe nyer mjal gyi tshad ma*). He suggests that Candrakīrti's own views are based on Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī*.[67] Knowledge, in this view, is defined simply as that which is non-deceptive within the realm of worldly convention.[68] And this, Tsongkhapa claims, is exactly how we ordinarily define knowledge.

We can now relate all the above discussion on Madhyamaka's pan-fictional view and its ramifications for Tsongkhapa's reading of the theory of two truths to Candrakīrti's three meanings of the term *saṃvṛti*. *Saṃvṛti* as that which 'obscures' or 'covers' relates to the illusory nature of all things: it is the illusion of intrinsic reality or of existing by means of own-being, which appears so vividly to our ordinary mind. *Saṃvṛti* as 'mutual dependence' relates to the world of everyday reality; this is the world of causality and change where event *A* can be said to cause event *B*. This is the surface-level reality where the cycle of birth and death occurs. For Tsongkhapa, maintaining the reality of this world is crucial for spiritual liberation; denial of this dimension constitutes falling into nihilism, which according to Tsongkhapa, can only lead to spiritual downfall. *Saṃvṛti* as 'language' and 'convention' pertains to the mere nominality of all phenomena. This refers to the being-only nature of things, essence-free and utterly devoid of intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity. As can be inferred, these three senses of *saṃvṛti*, though distinct, are intimately connected with each other. *Saṃvṛti* as mutual dependence serves as the basis, while *saṃvṛti* as that which obscures or covers demonstrates the illusion-like nature of phenomena. This opens the way then to a re-engagement with the world, albeit with a world that is free of essence or intrinsic being and is of being-only (*yod tsam*). This is reminiscent of the three-stage process described by Nāgārjuna in which a Mādhyamika practitioner gradually deepens his or her insight into emptiness. In *Mūlamadhayamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna states:

> That which is dependently originated
> is taught to be emptiness,
> for it is dependently designated.
> That itself is the middle path.[69]

What we see here is clearly a profound convergence between dependent origination and emptiness. In other words, there is an

equation between contingent identity and absence of intrinsic being. As we have seen, for Tsongkhapa, emptiness is not a mere nothingness; rather it is the real mode of being of things. In an ultimate sense, things and events are devoid of any intrinsic reality. Both their existence and identity are contingent in that they are derived from other factors within a complex interconnected world. In other words, it is within an interconnected world of dependent origination that cause and effect, identity and difference, entity and non-entity, function within a cohesive system. The world of dependent origination demonstrates a rich dynamic system where things and events do come into being and do cease to exist. It is a world where coherence and order could justifiably be expected yet need not compromise the fundamentally transient and empty nature of things. As we observed in chapter two, for Tsongkhapa, the concept of 'dependence' precludes any notion of intrinsic nature since 'intrinsic existence' necessarily entails 'independence'. Thus, dependent origination and emptiness (as absence of independence) can be said to be the two sides of the same coin. Or, better still, they are dual perspectives on one and the same world. Tsongkhapa seems to regard this equation of dependent origination with emptiness of intrinsic existence to be the essence of Candrakīrti's reading of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness. For example, in *LTC* Tsongkhapa states:

> Therefore, the intelligent ones should develop convictions in (a) the understanding of how [reflections on] dependent origination give rise to insight into emptiness of intrinsic existence, and (b) how things, which are devoid of intrinsic existence, arise as causes and effects. You should develop certainty to the point that others cannot lead you elsewhere. That the meaning of dependent origination is the meaning of emptiness of intrinsic existence has been taught in the definitive scriptures and their commentaries, that is the excellent Madhyamaka treatises. This is a distinctive feature of the Mādhyamikas [in general] and it is the [very profound] and subtle import of the thought of Ārya Nāgārjuna and his son [Āryadeva] as interpreted by Buddhapalitā and Candrakīrti.[70]

Having said this, however, as we already observed in chapter 1, it is clear that Tsongkhapa does not intend this equation between emptiness and dependent origination to be taken in a purely

objective, ontological sense. According to him, such an equation becomes possible only in the aftermath of a profound re-orientation of consciousness that results from deep insights into emptiness.

Beyond absolutism, nihilism, and relativism

Like all Mādhyamikas, Tsongkhapa characterizes his own position as the Middle Way free of the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Needless to say, almost all thinkers within the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist world claim to be proponents of a philosophy that is free of these two extremes.[71] The extremes of 'eternalism' (*rtag mtha'*), 'existence' (*yod mtha'*), and 'reification' (*sgro 'dogs kyi mtha'*) are regarded as synonymous; whereas, at the other end of the spectrum, the extremes of 'nihilism' (*chad mtha'*), 'non-existence' (*med pa'i mtha'*), and 'repudiation' (*skur 'debs kyi mtha'*) are considered to be synonymous. These standpoints are said to be extremes in that anyone who adheres to these views falls into an abyss. Tsongkhapa uses falling off a cliff as an analogy for falling into these extremes.[72]

Briefly stated, for Tsongkhapa the identity of the two extremes is rather straightforward. The intrinsic existence of phenomena, that is, existence by means of intrinsic nature, lies at one end of the spectrum, namely, eternalism, while the non-existence of phenomena even on the conventional level is the other end of the spectrum, namely, nihilism. Adherence to a standpoint that maintains that things and events exist in-between the two bounds is said to be the true middle way. Having said this, the situation is not as simple as it seems. Let us now look at some of the complexities of Tsongkhapa's own identification of the nature of the two extremes and what he perceives to be the Prāsaṅgika's unique cognitive process of countering our tendencies towards these two extremes.

Tsongkhapa makes an interesting distinction between two types of nihilism. He identifies as 'nihilism through repudiation' those views that are normally regarded as nihilistic, such as views that repudiate the conventional existence of all phenomena, including the law of causality and *karma*.[73] For example, in *RG*, Tsongkhapa makes the following observation:

> Those phenomena that exist conventionally, such as cause and effect, cannot be invalidated by any forms of knowledge.

> Therefore, any subjects that reject their existence or hold them to be non-existent are views adhering to nihilism, and the content of these beliefs constitute the extreme of non-existence. To hold 'the Buddhas do not possess faults' is not nihilistic; nor is the object of this view in anyway the extreme of non-existence.[74]

Tsongkhapa also identifies another type of nihilism, which he calls 'nihilism through reification.'[75] By this, Tsongkhapa contends that grasping as absolute the negation of intrinsic existence is itself a form of nihilism. This is the reification of emptiness, for this constitutes absolutizing that which is the direct negation of intrinsic being itself. By identifying such a view as nihilistic, perhaps Tsongkhapa wishes to draw our attention towards the intimate connection that exists between the extremes of nihilism and eternalism. There is almost a pendulum-like swinging relation between the two ends of the spectrum. For example, when emptiness is absolutized, this entails a rejection of the reality of the conventional world thus causing one to fall into nihilism. Similarly, when no existential status is accorded to the world of everyday experience, the result is to believe in some kind of transworldly absolute entity, thus causing one to fall into eternalism.

Based on a reading of a passage from Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (15:11b) Tsongkhapa also identifies a third form of nihilism. He argues that so long as one is operating within the notion of a world that possesses intrinsic existence, even an apprehension of a thing's cessation constitutes falling into nihilism. This is because anything that possesses intrinsic being must possess an identity that is both synchronic and diachronic. That is, the thing in question cannot undergo any change except total cessation. Therefore, to view something as both intrinsically real and at the same time transient is to hold that it will totally cease to exist after only a single instant. This, of course, would be nihilism for it constitutes a denial of the reality of the object.[76]

To relate the above to our discussion on persons, the following views fall into one of the extremes. These extreme views, according to Tsongkhapa, are anathema and, hence, must be avoided. To hold that person exists with intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) is to fall into eternalism. Similarly, to maintain that there exists an absolute referent to our first-person pronoun 'I' is also to fall into eternalism. In contrast, the denial of the conventional reality of

persons is to fall into nihilism. Furthermore, the reification of the absence of a person's intrinsic existence – i.e., the non-being of person – is also to fall into nihilism, for this would constitute grasping at a person's non-being.

Therefore, to accept persons as essence-free and illusion-like, capable of effecting all conventional functionality, transcends the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. As regards the question of what exactly is the 'middle' (*madhyama*), there seems to be an almost deliberate ambivalence in the Madhyamaka literature, including in Tsongkhapa's otherwise clarity-conscious writings. At times, Tsongkhapa appears to state that emptiness itself, i.e., the absence of intrinsic being, *is* the middle. Tsongkhapa quotes the following passage from *Kāśyapaparivartasūtra*:

> O Kāśyapa, what is this middle path that thoroughly discerns upon phenomena their individual characteristics? O Kāśyapa, it is that which thoroughly discerns in all things the absence of selfhood, the absence of sentience, the absence of life-force, the absence of regeneration, the absence of individuality, the absence of personhood ... O Kāśyapa, this is called 'the middle path thoroughly discerning the individual characteristics of all phenomena.'[77]

Yet, when expounding the process in which the views pertaining to the two extremes can be transcended, Tsongkhapa seems to suggest that the true middle is the illusion-like character of phenomena as articulated before, the cognition of which is evidently subsequent to the absolute negation of intrinsic existence. This comes through most strongly when Tsongkhapa makes a distinction between the 'cognition' of emptiness and what he calls the 'culmination of analysis' pertaining to the development of the view.[78]

Tsongkhapa agrees that, generally speaking, it is the insight into emptiness that dispels eternalism, and it is the profound awareness of the apparent world that overcomes nihilism. Thus, it seems logical to surmise that, strictly speaking, the nominal reality of phenomena that is established in the aftermath of emptiness' thoroughgoing deconstruction should be characterized as the true middle. Perhaps the distinction isn't too significant to be ascertained. Or better still, there may be a purpose to this deliberate ambiguity, which may have to do with the articulation of the Prāsaṅgika nominalistic ontology. But before we explore this issue further, let us look at what Tsongkhapa sees as a uniqueness

of the Prāsaṅgika's position concerning how to counter the extremes of existence and non-existence.

Interestingly, Tsongkhapa states on several occasions that there exists such a unique Prāsaṅgika approach.[79] For the Prāsaṅgika, it is *appearance* (instead of emptiness) that counters eternalism, and it is *emptiness* (instead of appearance) that counters nihilism. Such a reversal in this process can only be effected because of the unique Prāsaṅgika understanding of the principle of dependent origination, whereby dependent origination is equated with final emptiness. As 'appearance' now implies mere nominality – i.e., real in name and concept only – it implies a denial of intrinsic being. Whereas 'emptiness,' because of being equated with dependent origination, entails mere conditionedness, that is, a mere coming into being of causes and conditions.

The question now is, How can we, employing modern philosophical typology, characterize Tsongkhapa's own position *vis-à-vis* the ontological status of persons and the world? It is quite obvious that his view is the furthest from any form of absolutism. As we observed in chapter 2, for Tsongkhapa, the core of the Madhyamaka theory of emptiness is to free the mind from all temptations of reification, be they in the form of *ātman, brahman*, elementary *dharma*s, indivisible atoms, absolute consciousness, the autonomy of reason, and so on.[80] Certainly, the position cannot be characterized as nihilism, for there is a conscious awareness of the need to accord a meaningful, robust existential status to things. If Tsongkhapa can be criticised at all, it might be for being too concerned about safeguarding 'existence' from the Madhyamaka dialectic and thus parting somewhat from the general spirit of the Prāsaṅgika emphasis on negation. In fact, Tsongkhapa's Tibetan critics have charged him with over-emphasising the dimension of appearance at the expense of emptiness.[81]

Since Tsongkhapa's ontology contains no notion of an underlying unitary substratum, it cannot be defined by any criterion as monistic. Although Tsongkhapa undeniably accepts that emptiness is the sole ultimate (*paramārtha*), there is no suggestion that it (emptiness) is some kind of underlying hidden absolute with unique ineffable metaphysical properties. For emptiness too is 'relative' in that its identity and existence are contingent upon the things on which it is defined. For Tsongkhapa, apart from the emptinesses of individual things and persons, there is no 'universal,' all-encompassing emptiness that can be characterized as some kind of

great 'mother-emptiness.' Perhaps agnosticism might be considered a more appropriate epithet. Yet even here there is a problem. There does not appear to be much of an element of agnosticism even in Tsongkhapa's description of the ultimate nature of reality. Admittedly, although Tsongkhapa accepts a degree of ineffability as well as the transcendence of concepts of ultimate reality, he does not ground these dimensions in objective features of reality. For him, they reflect fundamental limitations in the ability of language and thought to describe reality. Hence, the choice of the *ārya*'s noble silence to illustrate the closest approximation to the ultimate nature of reality. If, on the other hand, we understand agnosticism as not subscribing to any theories pertaining to the ultimate nature of reality, this is surely not different from what Tsongkhapa calls the 'no-thesis' view. For Tsongkhapa, perhaps the main problem with agnosticism is that the line between agnosticism and full-blown epistemological scepticism is extremely fine, if not non-existent. And as I have suggested in chapter 1, Tsongkhapa sees epistemological scepticism, ontological nihilism, and moral relativism as different aspects of the same spectrum.[82]

Let us now turn our attention to two modern philosophical epithets which, to my mind, seem to be closest to Tsongkhapa's philosophy – namely, relativism and nominalism. Here, too, a note of caution is necessary. If by relativism we mean that no objectivity is accorded to reality, then Tsongkhapa's position does not fit the description. Tsongkhapa definitely accepts a high degree of objectivity in that much of the coherence that we perceive in reality is not entirely subjective.[83] Furthermore, like all Prāsaṅgikas, Tsongkhapa does not reject the reality *out there*. What is denied is its intrinsic existence and intrinsic identity. The identity and being that the world possesses are said to be only contingent. Insofar as this is true, there is an element of relativism in Tsongkhapa's ontology. However, this is not to say that no reality exists outside our language and thought. Fire still burns, water still quenches our thirst, and sentient beings are still born under the power of their *karma*. There is nothing purely linguistic or conceptual about these facts of reality. These reservations also apply in the context of calling Tsongkhapa's philosophy nominalism. Admittedly, I suggested earlier that at the very least, Tsongkhapa's ontology can be seen as a form of nominalism. I have justified this on the grounds that the existential status that Tsongkhapa accords to reality is nominal. It is, to use his own words, a worldly convention. Having said this, I have

immediately hastened to add that his ontology is also a form of realism. Thus, I have called it 'conventional realism'. Matilal has suggested that we add one more to the repertoire of our description of the Prāsaṅgika philosophy, namely, that it is anti-metaphysical.[84]

So far in this chapter we have addressed the basic ontological question of the person's existence in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy. I have suggested that, given Tsongkhapa's explicit rejection of any notion of intrinsic existence, his ontology is best understood as a form of nominalism. Interestingly, we discovered that in contrast to his ontology, Tsongkhapa espouses a somewhat realist epistemology. I have suggested that if we understand this realism as what I have called 'conventional realism,' there is no contradiction for Tsongkhapa. I have also argued that Tsongkhapa's nominalistic ontology must be situated within the general Mahāyāna discourse on the doctrine of the two truths. We also addressed some of the philosophical ramifications of Tsongkhapa's nominalism, namely, his understanding of the world as illusion-like. Finally, by using contemporary Western philosophical classifications, we attempted to understand what Tsongkhapa means by characterizing his philosophy as the Middle Way. This then takes us to the final part of our study, namely, Tsongkhapa's understanding of the relationship between no-self, reason, and soteriology.

No-self, reason, and soteriology

How does Tsongkhapa perceive the relationship between his philosophical analysis of no-self and the realization of his soteriological goal? We know that Tsongkhapa subscribes to the basic premise that it is only through generating profound insight (*prajñā*) into no-self that an individual can aspire to attain spiritual freedom (*mokṣa*).[85] However, as to exactly what this profound insight consists of, there is a divergence of opinion amongst Tibetan thinkers. A key focus of their dispute centres on the role of critical reasoning and discursive thought in Buddhist soteriology. This dispute is an old one, and has received extensive discussion in contemporary scholarship on Tibetan studies.[86] As far as Tsongkhapa is concerned, critical analysis occupies a vital place within the overall path of gaining insight into no-self, or emptiness. In the following, I shall present in a broad sketch Tsongkhapa's case for the central role of reasoning in gaining insight (*prajñā*) into the ultimate nature of reality.

Perhaps one of the key points in Tsongkhapa's claim that critical reasoning is indispensable for enlightenment relates to his understanding of the nature of *avidyā* – fundamental ignorance – which is thought to lie at the root of our unenlightenment. According to Tsongkhapa, this *avidyā* is not a state of mere unknowing; rather, it is an active, cognitive state of 'mis-knowing.'[87] It apprehends our own existence and the world as enjoying some kind of intrinsic, ontological status. This belief is considered to lie at the heart of our reifying perspectives that tie us to a perpetual state of bondage. If this is the case, then Tsongkhapa seems to ask, 'How can a state of mere non-discursiveness free us?' Non-discursiveness is essentially a passive withdrawal of the mind from all mental activity, which can at best lead to a state of non-mentation, or a blank mind. This state of non-mentation, however, cannot have any real effect in rooting out our fundamental ignorance, for it does not penetrate into the depth of *avidyā's* delusory nature. For how can simply not thinking about it help dispel our fear of snake in a cave? Only by discovering that there is no snake in the cave can we eliminate this fear from the mind.[88] And, this act of discovery constitutes, for Tsongkhapa, a primarily cognitive process involving critical analysis, i.e., reason.

Thus, at the heart of the claim lies the following thesis: it is only by *cognizing* the absence of intrinsic existence of self and the world – *seeing* that they are empty of ultimate existence – that the process of undoing our unenlightenment can begin.[89] Of course, this takes us back to the question of deconstructing our innate apprehensions of selfhood in relation to our own existence and the world. For Tsongkhapa, a negation of the self's intrinsic existence and a cognition of the absence of the self's intrinsic existence are one and the same. This is because of the logical principles of the law of the excluded middle and the principle of contradiction and so on, and also because of the use in Madhyamaka deconstructive analysis of the non-implicative (*prasajya*) form of negation.[90] Thus, when the intrinsic being of self is negated, the absence of the self's intrinsic being is *affirmed*. This is the negative entailment of *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, 26b.[91]

For example, if I have eliminated the presence of a yak in front of King's College Chapel, I can be said to have established the absence of yak there. For either there is a yak in front of King's Chapel or there isn't. There are no two ways about this. For Tsongkhapa, given that the Mādhyamika aspirant's negation of

intrinsic being is absolute, there is nothing non-committal about it. Just as the Mādhyamika negates intrinsic being, so is he committed to affirming its absence. In other words, Tsongkhapa accepts the non-existence of intrinsic being, albeit in the form of a negation. In *LN*, Tsongkhapa makes the following concluding statement:

> Likewise, the scriptures that expound the absence of intrinsic existence do so by simply rejecting [the notion of] intrinsic existence. Similarly, the negation of intrinsic being through critical awareness is itself the cognition of the absence of intrinsic being; so is the negation of intrinsic being through reasoning the *affirmation* of the absence of intrinsic existence. Therefore, do not say such things like, 'The scriptures do not have subject matter,' [or] 'Cognition has no object,' and 'Reasoning has no thesis to establish!'[92]

Since the negation of intrinsic being constitutes for Tsongkhapa a cognition of ultimate truth, to have knowledge of emptiness through inference is thus a case of 'knowing that'. It is definitely not a state of mere non-cognition; rather, it is an active state of cognition whose content is the emptiness of intrinsic existence.[93] Thus, according to Tsongkhapa, all the arguments in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* are clearly aimed at the absolute negation of intrinsic existence (*svabhāvasiddhi*), rather than leading to a mere non-apprehension of it. Therefore, critical reason does indeed play a crucial role in the Mādhyamika aspirant's path to awakening.

From a practical religious point of view, Tsongkhapa argues that insight into reality – that is, seeing the way things really are – is the essence of the path to enlightenment.[94] This is because, as shown earlier, a state of misknowing, or fundamental confusion, lies at the heart of our unenlightened existence. For Tsongkhapa an insight capable of eradicating this deeply ingrained misknowledge comes only through a convergence of deep meditative concentration (*samadhi*) and sharp penetration of the mind into the way things really are (*tathatā*).[95] For this, the attainment of both deep contemplation and profound analysis is essential. In fact, Tsongkhapa opens the section on 'Special Insight' in *LRC* by underlining the above point.[96] The first element, concentration, results from an intensive training in the art of meditation whereby the religious practitioner gains a high degree of single-pointedness of mind. In Buddhist parlance, this is known as 'tranquil abiding of mind' (*śamatha*) and is believed to be attained through what are known

as nine stages of mental development.[97] In contrast, the second aspect of the path, penetrating insight (*vipaśyanā*), can be attained only through a rational, cognitive process involving analysis.[98] From this point of view, too, critical reasoning can be seen as crucial to one's awakening. In fact, Tsongkhapa categorically states:

> If one lacks the ascertainment derived from a firm understanding of no-self, it is not possible for the realization of penetrative insight (*vipaśyanā*) to arise within the person.[99]

Judging by Tsongkhapa's arguments for the central role of critical reasoning in the liberative process, it seems safe to arrive at the following opinion. One can say that in Tsongkhapa's thought, '... the old problem of justifying or validating religious or mystical experience, which claims to be its *own* arbiter of truth, is overcome by accepting as true only experiences, the contents of which correspond to that reached by critical, analytical thought.'[100] Although it is clear that for Tsongkhapa, the initial knowledge of no-self, or emptiness of intrinsic being, is inferential (*anumana*) and is thus gained through a rational, cognitive process, there is an appreciation of the progressive stages in which that knowledge is deepened. Following Dharmakīrti's epistemology, Tsongkhapa envisions a certain sequence in the process of gaining such an insight. We can summarise this process in the following table. (Table 2).

Paul Williams has said that there are serious difficulties in making sense of the claim that the mere absence of intrinsic being is the content of the mental state supposedly cognizing ultimate truth. He has especially noted that it is not clear that we can distinguish a state of consciousness with a negative object from unconsciousness. He has suggested that, in the final analysis, there is the danger that Tsongkhapa's own views can also be seen as sliding into the blank-mind thesis, which he so vehemently rejects.[101]

As Williams himself has noted, there is, first of all, a distinction between an inferential cognition of no-self and the direct, unmediated non-conceptual experience of no-self by an *ārya*'s transcendent awareness. In the former case, the problem is less acute for it makes perfect sense to speak about arriving at a knowledge of the absence of intrinsic being. Just as we can make perfect sense of talking about the presence or absence of the ontological category of intrinsic being, so we can make sense of the notion that one could arrive at the knowledge that beings thus conceived do not exist. Of course, this is presupposing that we have

Table 2 Progressive Stages of Deepening Insight into 'No-Self' and the Epistemological Process Involved

Cognitive Process	Reasoning Process
1. Loosening of one's grip on intellectually acquired notions of self-existence *mtha' gcig 'dzin gyi log rtog zlog pa*	1. Application of consequential reasoning, i.e., *reductio ad absurdum* *thal 'gyur bkod pa*
2. Dawning of a conceptual understanding of no-self *bdag med la yid dpyod kyi go ba chags pa*	2. Application of syllogistic reasoning *gtan tshigs yag dag bkod pa*
3. Inferential cognition of no-self, i.e., emptiness of intrinsic existence. *rang bzhin med pa rjes dpag gis rtogs pa*	3. Same as #2 above.
4. Realization of the nominal reality of things and events, i.e., their illusion-like nature *chos rnams tha snad tsam du yod par nges pa*	4. Subsequent reflection on the phenomenological reality of things and events *rang bzhin khegs pa'i rjes gzugs sogs bsnyon med du snang ba*
5. Convergence of emptiness and dependent origination. *stong dang rten byung don dcig dus nges pa*	5. Culmination of one's analysis into the ultimate nature of reality *lta ba'i dpyad pa rdzogs pa*

first made a logical distinction between an absence of intrinsic existence and mere nothingness. It also assumes that the logical differences between various forms of negation have corresponding epistemological ramifications.

If the criticism is aimed at the notion of the *ārya*'s non-conceptual awareness and its supposed unmediated experience of no-self, Williams himself has admitted that to an extent the problem arises from trying to describe an experience that is said to be essentially ineffable. So the conceptual issue now is whether or not we can make sense of negative objects as acceptable contents of an experience that is unmediated in that it engages with its object without the media of language or thought. In other words, the question still remains as to whether or not, in the final analysis, one can maintain any meaningful distinction between a non-conceptual

experience of mere nothingness and emptiness, which is said to be a negative object. To address this question here would take us far beyond the scope of our present study. Perhaps the problem arises more acutely when the idea of emptiness as an object of experience is understood too closely in terms of the paradigmatic model of the relationship between a perception and its object. There is also the question of whether we can make sense of a cognitive experience whose object is said to be ineffable. Tsongkhapa cites the analogy of the impossibility of understanding through words alone the taste of sugarcane exactly as experienced. In the same way, he suggests, words can never describe in full the manner in which emptiness is experienced by the *ārya*'s non-conceptual awareness. Yet, he rejects the suggestion that this entails that emptiness is totally inaccessible to language and thought.[102]

Tsongkhapa describes his own emptiness as being free of what he sees as the 'three fallacies' of a flawed understanding of emptiness. In *LTCh* he writes:

> Since all functionality is tenable, our's is not a nihilistic emptiness. Since it entails [re-]cognizing what has always been the case, namely, that all things are empty, [our emptiness] is not a mere fabrication of the imagination. Since I maintain that all [things] share this [empty] nature, [our emptiness] is not a partial emptiness.[103]

By characterizing the emptiness he propounds as not 'nihilistic nothingness,' Tsongkhapa is probably responding to some Tibetan thinkers who have criticised Candrakīrti's emptiness as nihilistic.[104] The crux of Tsongkhapa's defence seems to be based on the claim that within his own ontology a coherent and robust existential status is accorded to the everyday world of experience. He also seems to suggest that since 'knowledge' of the emptiness of intrinsic being is arrived at through critical awareness, that emptiness cannot be construed as mere nothingness. He is arguing that just as emptiness can be *established* through critical reasoning so can it be *cognized* and *experienced* by the practitioner. Furthermore, as gaining insight into emptiness is a case of the individual coming to 'realize' what has always been the case, the emptiness as envisioned by Tsongkhapa is not a mere construct of the imagination. Also, since this emptiness is a universal principle in that it embraces all things and events, it cannot be said to be incomplete. Thus, Tsongkhapa concludes:

> Because of this, contemplation on it [emptiness] can become a powerful antidote against all thoughts manifestly attached to the notion of self-existence. It is not the case that this profound truth cannot be *cognized* by any cognitive event, for [the understanding of] it is arrived at through a correct view. Also, as it can be taken as the object of one's meditation on the perfect truth, this is not the kind of emptiness that cannot be *practised* on the path; nor is it something that cannot be *understood* or *cognized.*[105]

For Tsongkhapa, a successful negation of intrinsic existence through critical enquiry is only the first step in a long process of deepening one's profound insight into the ultimate nature of reality that leads to full enlightenment. Thus, according to Tsongkhapa, deconstruction alone is not adequate; it must be followed by a reconstructive approach to relate the aphophatic experience back to the reality of the everyday world. This relates to the consequent experience of the illusion-like nature of all phenomena, that is, stage four in our table. In the immediate aftermath of a profound deconstruction of intrinsic existence, when the perception of self and the world returns, it is believed that this happens in a totally refined sense. Self and the world appear almost in a 'new' light – i.e., they are both actual and empty of intrinsic existence, which has always been the case. Self and the world now *appear* illusion-like. According to Tsongkhapa, this marks the realization of the profound nature of dependent origination. Earlier, I compared this to an understanding of *saṃvṛti* as mere designation and convention.[106] This is also the re-engagement with the world I spoke of earlier.

Tsongkhapa envisions the culmination of one's analysis into the ultimate nature of things as a profound convergence between emptiness and dependent origination. (This is stage five in our table.) He develops a criterion for this in a letter entitled the *Three Principal Elements of the Path*, which was written at the behest of a student.[107] Tsongkhapa suggests that at the initial stage of one's insight, emptiness and the unfailing operations of the world of causality appear to the mind as totally separate and somewhat unrelated. In fact, to many they appear quite incompatible. (Recall the 'paradox' of emptiness and dependent origination we observed in chapter 2.) However, as a result of a prolonged process of deepening one's insight into emptiness, a stage will be reached

whereby the perceptions of the two facts – i.e., emptiness of intrinsic being and the functionality of the causal world – become simultaneous. At this point, the mind of the Mādhyamika practitioner is believed to have reached such a developed stage that even a mere perception of the fact of dependent origination spontaneously gives rise to the deconstruction of the solidity of all objects of cognition.[108] For such a person, it is said that emptiness truly equals dependent origination.

Perhaps the most important test of valid insight into emptiness for Tsongkhapa is how one's understanding manifests in action.[109] If, as a result of prolonged contemplation on emptiness, the individual becomes more and more desensitized to the sufferings of the world, there is a serious flaw in one's understanding of the teachings on no-self.[110] According to Tsongkhapa, a deepening of one's understanding of emptiness must naturally lead to a deepening of one's belief in the principles of causality and *karma*.[111] In other words, profound awareness of the truly empty nature of things and events must manifest in compassionate ethical behaviour. Tsongkhapa coins the wonderful expression 'the Mahāyānist whose understanding of the view of emptiness has correctly hit the point.'[112] One could say that compassionate action is the *authentic* way of being in no-self. Tsongkhapa is here articulating the spirit of an eloquent passage from *Madhayamakāvatāra* where Candrakīrti describes how insight into emptiness enhances the bodhisattva's practice of the other five perfections – generosity, morality, forbearance, vigour, and concentration.[113] Candrakīrti's passage and Tsongkhapa's reading of it seem to echo the idea of a Mādhyamika aspirant living the principles of no-self at all levels of his or her personal life. One could say that in the ethical sense, this refers to living a totally altruistic way of life, for all actions that pertain to others now stem from a perspective that is no longer rooted in the notion of a 'truly' important, egoistic self. From the philosophical point of view, such a way of life represents a mode of being that is free from grasping at supposedly 'real' entities. Soteriologically speaking, this is a life of true freedom from attachment and clinging. And in the practical sense, it is a way of being in the world, simply and in a truly authentic way.

Conclusion

In this study I have endeavoured to present a comprehensive and synthetic overview of Tsongkhapa's highly influential Madhyamaka philosophy. To an appreciable extent, therefore, this book can also serve as a detailed introduction to many of the basic themes, issues, and debates that are dominant within Tibetan philosophical discourse. Given the extent of Tsongkhapa's writings on the subject, there is simply no way that a book-length study, no matter how detailed, can serve as a substitute for the original works of Tsongkhapa himself. It is hoped, however, that this study will provide at least a beginning for many by bringing Tsongkhapa's thought into what can be called contemporary philosophical idiom.

Needless to say, a study of this nature cannot be entirely exhaustive. Furthermore, it must be stated that some of my conclusions may need to be treated with a degree of conditionality. This is particularly true with regard to the historically important question of the originality of many aspects of Tsongkhapa's philosophical thought. Although I have striven to remain sensitive to the need for situating Tsongkhapa's thought in the context of what Paul Williams calls 'interrelationships of rivalry and agreement between scholars,'[1] it is beyond the scope of the present study to explore fully the wider historical context of the development of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka. To do this would entail a thorough study of the history of Madhyamaka thought in Tibet, or at least of what Ruegg describes as the 'classical period' – from the fourteenth to the end of the sixteenth century.[2] Another matter that is pertinent to understanding the development of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka is discerning the exact nature of the

relationship in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy between the thoughts of the Indian Mādhyamika thinker Candrakīrti and the Indian epistemologist Dharmakīrti. From the philosophical point of view, addressing this question would shed light on Tsongkhapa's own epistemology and the way that it influenced his reading of the Indian Madhyamaka literature. I have suggested a possible way of reconciling what I see as Tsongkhapa's ontological nominalism and epistemological realism. However, space prevents us from delving into the details of this enterprise.

There is also the critical question of how far Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought differs from that of his Indian predecessors. This is because, unlike many of the Indian Mādhyamika thinkers, Tsongkhapa develops his Madhyamaka philosophy within a wider system of thought and praxis that includes Dharmakīrti's epistemology and Asaṅga's (c. 310–90) and Vasubandhu's Abhidharma phenomenology and psychology on the one hand, and Vajrayāna Buddhism on the other. This is certainly a question that again lies outside the scope of our study. As regards the question of Vajrayāna influence, I have followed a methodological principle in my reading that is salient in Tsongkhapa's own writings, which is that although Tsongkhapa constantly invokes Madhyamaka ideas in his discourse on Vajrayāna, he very rarely, if ever, brings into his Madhyamaka discussion any specifically Vajrayāna concepts. This inclines me to think that, contrary to what Michael Broido has suggested,[3] Tsongkhapa relies strictly on the works of the founding fathers of the Indian Madhyamaka schools in developing his Madhyamaka philosophy. In other words, Tsongkhapa can be seen as adopting a Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka reading of Vajrayāna, but not vice versa. Again, this lies outside the purview of this work to enter into the full details of this important issue.

From a philosophical standpoint, a key question that requires further research is in what way Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka philosophy, especially his categorical rejection of any notion of intrinsic existence, provides a more secure foundation for ethical and religious activity, in contrast to, for example, the positions of many of his Tibetan predecessors. The trajectory of Tsongkhapa's arguments for the efficacy of ethics and soteriology within an ontology that ultimately rejects any idea of the absolute still remains to be explored. And perhaps from a contemporary religious philosopher's point of view, one of the most interesting questions that remains is how Tsongkhapa perceives the relationship between

rationality, intuition, and emotion, the key constituents of the human psyche. I have briefly touched upon this issue in the final section of chapter 5. A detailed study of this would undoubtedly demand an exploration of Tsongkhapa's concept of mind and the theory of human nature that underlies such a concept. This, of course, is a matter for separate research.

Notes

Introduction

1 See, for instance, *Haven of Faith* (p. 73) where Khedrup writes that 'inspired by a powerful faith in the Buddha derived through understanding, he wrote the praise entitled *Praise of Dependent Origination* that celebrates the teacher for having taught profound dependent origination.'

2 *Praise of Dependent Origination* (*rTen 'brel bstod pa*), *BTP*, pp. 1–7. This short text is memorized, recited, reflected upon, and debated to this day in the great monastic colleges of the Geluk school.

3 Robinson (1986), p. 14.

4 *Ibid.*

5 I am referring here to a range of theorists who argue in one way or another that an author has no privileged place in the reading of his own text. See, for example, Rorty (1982), p. 51.

6 Robinson (1986), p. 19.

7 Ruegg (1979), p. 278.

8 A paper devoted to this question of development in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka has been published in *Asiatiche Studien.* See Jinpa (2000).

9 Williams (1998), chapter 4. This topic of identifying the object of negation in Madhyamaka reasoning will be dealt with in chapter 2.

10 See, for example, chapter 3, p. 102.

11 I would like to thank Tom Tillemans for drawing my attention to the problematic nature of Tsongkhapa's relationship with his Indian sources. He has suggested that a study of how Tsongkhapa interpreted Indian texts, both from a historical as well as a philosophical point of view, could help to demystify significantly Tsongkhapa's role in the history of Tibetan philosophy. (Source: Email communication.)

12 As a professional translator who has worked principally for the present Dalai Lama, I have taken a keen and on-going interest in general questions relating to the practical and theoretical problems of translation.

13 Eckel (1987), p. 9.

14 Robinson (1986), p. 15.
15 On the distinction between the earlier and later periods of Tsongkhapa's philosophical development, see chapter 1, p. 18.
16 Tsongkhapa's collected works contain several explicitly poetic entries.
17 For comments on this work, see chapter 1, note 31.
18 For a detailed survey of the various schools of Indian Madhyamaka and their literature, see Ruegg (1981).

Chapter 1

1 Khedrup explicitly draws parallels between Tsongkhapa and Nāgārjuna in terms of their contribution to Buddhism. For example, he writes: 'Just as Ārya Nāgārjuna made great contributions to the teachings of the Buddha, similarly, when we have today reached such a degenerate age, in this land of snows the supreme master too ...' *Haven of Faith*, pp. 118–19.
2 The emergence of Atīśa's Kadam school seems to have led to a questioning of some of the doctrinal views and the tantras belonging to the period of earlier dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet. The historian Sumpa Yeshe Paljor (1704–88) lists the following works as illustrations: Lotsawa Rinchen Sangpo's (958–1055) *Chos dang chos min rnam 'byed*, the letters of Lha Lama Yeshe Ö, Shiwa Ö, Jhangchup Ö, Tsami Lotsawa, and Chak Lotsawa, Ngok Loden Sherap's (1059–1109) *gZe ma ra 'go*, and Sakya Paṇḍita's (1182–1251) *sDom gsum rab dbye*. Sumpa also cites Drigong Pelzin and Gö Khukpa Lhatse amongst those who question the authorship of some of the Nyingma tantras. See *dPag bsam ljon bzang*, pp. 391–406. Karmay (1980) identifies, with the help of Sokdokpa Lodrö Gyaltsen's (fifteenth century CE) response, those tantras that have been questioned by Shiwa Ö. Sokdokpa also wrote responses to qualms raised by Lha Lama Yeshe Ö, Drigong Pelzin, Gö Khukpa Lhatse, Karmapa Mikyö Dorje and others. See the bibliography.
3 Williams (1989: Spring), p. 2. Taktsang Lotsawa (b. 1405) makes a similar observation in his *Grub mtha' kun shes*, p. 210.
4 Williams (1989: Spring), p. 2.
5 This debate has been an object of considerable interest in modern Tibetan Buddhist scholarship. See Tucci (1958), Demieville (1967), Stein (1987), and Houston (1980). Y. Imaeda (1975) and Herbert Guenther (1977) have raised doubts about the factuality of the debate. However, I think that the weight of historical evidence is too great to deny that some kind of a debate or debates took place. Earliest Tibetan sources that deal extensively with the debate are: *sBa bzhed* and its revised version *Zhabs btags ma*, Neu Paṇḍita's *Chos 'byung*, Sakya Paṇḍita's *sDom gsum rab dbye*, Butön Rinchen Drup's *Chos 'byung*, and Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa's (1504–66) *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*. For a contemporary discussion of the wider philosophical and religious implications of the debate, see Ruegg (1989), especially parts 2, 3, and 4.
6 Ruegg (1989), p. 56. For a brief analysis of the political dimensions of this debate, see Richardson (1998), pp. 203–6.
7 bod rnams da slan chad lta ba na ga rdzu na'i lugs zungs/ spyod pa pha rol tu phyin pa drug la gyis la chos spyod rnam pa bcu nyams su longs/ sgom pa shes rab rnam gsum la blo sbyongs la thabs dang shes rab zung du chud cing 'brel ba

zhi gnas dang lhag mthong la sgoms shig/ ... The text cited here and translated above is from Tsuklak Trengwa, op. cit., pp. 390–1. Cf. Ruegg (1989), p. 62.

8 For example, there is now a general consensus within modern Madhyamaka scholarship that the labels 'Prāsaṅgika' and 'Svātantrika' and the sharp division among the Indian Mādhyamika thinkers along the two distinct lines as suggested by such labels are most probably a retrospective Tibetan creation. See, for example, Williams (1989: Spring), p. 3.

9 *LTC*, p. 250: 'di la dgongs nas lam ston pa'i bla ma'i mtshan nyid yongs su rdzogs pa la theg pa thams cad la mkhas pa mang du gsungs so//

10 A recently published bibliography of Tibetan works, *Bod kyi bstan bcos khag gcig gi mtshan byang dri med shel dkar phreng ba* (1985), p. 183, lists a catalogue of Tsongkhapa's collected works by Tsangtön Kunga Gyaltsen, a student of Jamyang Chöje Tashi Palden (1379–1449), who was in turn a student of Tsongkhapa and was the founder of the famous Drepung monastery near Lhasa.

11 See p. 22 and note 49 on disputes concerning the authorship of *Queries from a Pure Heart*. Questions have also been raised on the authorship of *Zab lam na ro chos drug gi khrid yid ches gsum ldan*, TKSB, vol. 8. For example, in his *Yellow Beryl: A History of [the] Ganden [Tradition]*, p. 69, the regent Desi Sangye Gyatso (1652–1705) refers to qualms he raised about the above text in his *gYa' sel*.

12 There is, however, an intriguing reference in *RG* to a text called *sTong thun*, suggesting that there is also a work of this title by Tsongkhapa. Not only is a text of this title not found in the standard edition of TKSB, but so far I have also failed to find any reference to it by any subsequent Tibetan commentators or modern scholars. The reference reads: tsig gsal las ni 'gag pa med pa skye med pa zhes sogs ni 'gag sogs yod par gsungs pa'i lung dang mi 'gal bar ston pa na zag med kyi ye shes kyi yul gyi rang bzhin gyi skye 'gag med pa yin zhes pa dang/ don dam pa'i skye ba bkag gi kun rdzob pa'i skye ba ma bkag ces ston mthun du bshad zin cing/ ... *RG*, p. 89. I once heard the respected Mādhyamika scholar of Drepung Loseling college, Shakhor Khensur Nyima Rinpoche, speculating that there was probably a work of Tsongkhapa by this name that was lost. I am inclined to think that by referring to *sTong thun*, Tsongkhapa may simply be following a literary convention whereby the section on the critique of epistemology in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* is called 'Tsig gsal stong thun' ('The Thousand Doses in One' from *Prasannapadā*). For example, Shangshung Chöwang Drakpa (1404–69) gives the title *dBu ma rtsa ba'i 'grel pa tshig gsal gyi mtha' bzhi'i skye ba 'gog pa'i stong thun* to his notes based on lectures of Khedrup. Similarly, Jamyang Shepa Ngagwang Tsöndrü (1648–1722) wrote a lengthy exposition of the above section of *Prasannapadā* again entitled *Tshig gsal stong thun gyi tshad ma'i rnam bshad*. For an interesting discussion on the meaning and origin of the expression *stong thun* and its association with medical concepts, see Cabezón (1992), pp. 403–4, note 41.

13 The full title is *Ngo mtshar rmad du byung ba'i rnam thar dad pa'i 'jug ngogs*, TKSB, vol. *ka*.

14 See Gareth Sparham's introduction to Sparham (1993), p. 15.

15 It seems clear that Rongtön Shakya Gyaltsen (1367–1449), who was also known as Rongtön Shejha Künrik, was one of the earliest critics of Tsongkhapa within the Sakya school. It is not clear whether he actually wrote any

refutations of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka works. In fact, to date we have no textual evidence to suggest that any substantial written critiques of Tsongkhapa appeared before his death. The Nyingma master Sangsang Neringpa (fifteenth century) refers to certain exchanges of letters between Tsongkhapa and several important scholars of the time, including Sangpo Lotsawa Ngawang, one Khenpo Chörin, and Jhangchup Lama. See *Ne rings rnam thar*, p. 5.

16 mdo rgyud kyi gnad dang mi mthun na thabs la bslu ba'i bdud yid dam gyi gzugs su brdzus nas chos log ston par gsungs te/ ... *lTa ba'i shan 'byed*, p. 244.

17 de dag rang nyid kyis kyang sngon gyi mkhas pa sus kyang ma thon pa'i grub mtha' yin par sgrogs shing/ gzhan gyis kyang de ltar du mthong ngo// Ibid., p. 244.

18 Amongst Khedrup's writings, those of particular relevance for our purpose here are, in addition to his monumental work on Madhyamaka entitled *A Dose of Emptiness* (*Collected Works*, vol. *ka*), *Lam ngan mun sel sgron me* (*Collected Works*, vol. *ta*), and *sDom pa gsum gyi rnam gzhag mdor dus te bshad pa thub bstan byi dor* (*Collected Works*, vol. *nya*). It appears that by the end of Khedrup's life there was already a strong perception that Tsongkhapa's followers constituted a distinct school of thought in Tibet.

19 *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad de kho na nyid gsal ba'i sgron me.*

20 Gorampa's key polemical works are his *dBu ma'i spyi don* and *lTa ba'i shan 'byed theg mchog gnad kyi zla zer.* Jamyang Galo has responded to these critiques in his *Go lan gnam lcags 'khor lo.* (I have only very recently succeeded in locating this text.) Sera Jetsünpa has also written a lengthy response to Gorampa as part of his polemical work critiquing both Shakya Chokden and Gorampa entitled *Zab mo stong pa nyid lta ba la log rtog 'gog par byed pa'i bstan bcos lta ba ngan pa'i mun sel.*

21 Taktsang's work is entitled *Grub mtha' kun shes nas mtha' bral grub pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos.* In rebuttal of this, Panchen Lobsang Chögyen (1567–1662) wrote *sGra pa shes rab rin chen pa'i rtsod lan lung rigs pa'i seng ge'i nga ro*, and later Phurchok Ngagwang Jhampa (1682–1762) wrote *brGal lan rdo rje'i gzegs ma.* In addition, Jamyang Shepa's monumental work on Buddhist philosophical tenets, *Grub mtha' chen mo*, is also intended partly as a rebuttal of Taktsang's critique. For a contemporary study of Taktsang's critique, see Tauscher (1995), and for a brief study of Panchen's rebuttal of Taktsang, see Cabezón (1995).

22 Shakya Chokden's works are *dBu ma rnam nges*, *dBu ma'i 'byung stul rnam par bshad pa'i gtam yid bzhin lhun po*, and *Shin rta'i srol chen gnyis las 'byung ba'i dbu ma chen po'i lugs gnyis rnam par dbye ba* and its autocommentary. For Sera Jetsünpa's response, see note 20.

23 Karmapa Mikyö Dorje's principal work on Madhyamaka is *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad dpal ldan dus gsum mkhyen pa'i zhal lung d'ags brgyud grub pa'i shing rta.* Sera Jetsünpa wrote a repudiation of Mikyö Dorje's arguments entitled *gSung lan glu sgrub dgongs rgyan.* For a succinct study of Mikyö Dorje's critique of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka, see Williams (1983).

24 *Haven of Faith*, p. 60.

25 For an interesting account of the earlier period of Tsongkhapa's intellectual life, see Sparham (1993), pp. 16–19.

26 *Byang chub lam rim chen mo*, TKSB, vol. *pa*. English translations of the last two sections of this important work – the sections on tranquil abiding and special insight – can be found in Wayman (1978). There is also a partial translation of the section on special insight in Napper (1989), part 2. A

complete English translation of *LRC* is under preparation by a group of scholars in the United States and the first volume of it's translation has been published by Snow Lion in 2000.

27 I have argued elsewhere that contrary to what many Geluk writers suggest, we can still discern a process of development even in Tsongkhapa's later period of Madhyamaka thought. See Jinpa (2000).

28 Van der Kuijp (1985), p. 56, draws attention to an allusion to a 'note of discord' between Khedrup and Gungru Gyaltsen Sangpo (1383–1450) on the interpretation of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka thought, as reported by Panchen Sönam Drakpa (d. 1554) in *bKa' gdams chos byung*, p. 138. Van der Kuijp suggests that the failure of some of Tsongkhapa's immediate disciples to have their writings committed to woodblocks is a cause for serious reflection. So far, I have failed to locate Gungru Gyaltsen Sangpo's Madhyamaka work, which is known simply as *sTong thun chung ba*.

29 On the whole, the *yig cha* texts must be, as they are probably intended by the authors, treated as textbooks designed to assist students in the monasteries to read the main Geluk classics, namely, the works of Tsongkhapa and his two principal students.

30 *Lhag mthong chen mo* (*LTC*), in *LRC*, TKSB, vol. *pa*. Completed in 1402. Unless otherwise stated, my source for the dating of Tsongkhapa's works is *Haven of Faith*. Gareth Sparham (1993) has raised doubts about the dating of many of Tsongkhapa's works. A full historical and text-critical study is required to ascertain the exact dates of the composition of these texts. Until then, I shall continue to rely on the Tibetan sources. *LTC* is Tsongkhapa's first major work on the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness. Elizabeth Napper has undertaken an extensive study of the *dgag bya ngos 'dzin* ('identifying the object of negation') section of *LTC* based on *Lam rim mchan bzhi sbrags*, the four interwoven annotations of Bhaso Chökyi Gyaltsen, Jamyang Shepa, Khenchen Ngagwang Rapten, and Drati Geshe Rinchen Dhöndup. See Napper (1989).

31 *Drang ba dang nges pa'i don rnam par 'byed pa'i btan bcos legs bshad snying po* (*LN*), TKSB, vol. *pha*. Completed in 1407, *LN* is arguably Tsongkhapa's most influential philosophical treatise. The text sets out a systematic hermeneutic and philosophical approach to distinguish between the 'provisional' (*neyārtha*) and 'definitive' (*nītārtha*) meanings of the Mahāyāna scriptures. Within such a hermeneutic framework, *LN* presents the philosophical standpoints of the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. For information on a study of this important text in English, see the bibliography.

32 *rTsa ba shes rab kyi rnam bshad rigs pa'i rgya mtsho* (*RG*), TKSB, vol. *ba*. Completed in 1407.

33 *Lhag mthong chung ngo* (*LTCh*) in *LRCh*, TKSB, vol. *pha*. *LTCh* is the section on special insight from the abridged version of the *Lam rim* that Tsongkhapa wrote a few years before his death. The approximate date of its composition is 1415. *LTCh* is especially noted for its lengthy treatment of the Madhyamaka theory of the two truths, which is missing in *LTC*.

34 *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rnam bshad dgongs pa rab gsal* (*GR*), TKSB, vol. *ma*. Completed in 1418, *GR* is considered to be the last major work on Madhyamaka written by Tsongkhapa. It is also the main textbook on Madhyamaka philosophy used in all the main Geluk monastic colleges.

35 *dGe sbyor gyi gnad la dri ba snyan bskul ba lhag bsam rab dkar, Queries*, TKSB, vol. *ka*. For comments on this work, see later.
36 See, for example, *rJe btsun gyis rje tsong kha pa la gdams pa las red mda' bar shog dril du phul ba*, in TKSB, vol. *pha*.
37 TKSB, vol. *kha*.
38 *Zhus lan sman mchog bdud rtsi'i phreng ba*, TKSB, vol. *ka*.
39 See, for instance, Guru Tashi's (b. unknown) *Gur bkra'i chos byung* (completed in 1873), pp. 609, 980. The tentative date of *Zhus lan* is 1395, a year or two after Tsongkhapa's restoration of the statue of the future Buddha Maitreya at Ölkha. Druk Gyalwang Chöje's *Extended Biography*, p. 219, states that Tsongkhapa was thirty-nine years old (that is, thirty-eight according to conventional counting) when he met Lhodrak Drupchen. This is certainly before he composed both *LTC* and *LN*. In view of this, it is difficult to see how the doctrinal standpoints presented in this small text can be argued as superceding all the major works on Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness, which are all, in fact, subsequent to the said piece.
40 *dKa' gnad brgad kyi zin bris rje'i gsung bzhin brjed byang du bkod pa*, TKSB, vol. *ba*. Notes taken by Gyaltsap.
41 *Rigs pa drug cu pa'i zin bris*, TKSB, vol. *ba*. Notes taken by Gyaltsap.
42 *sPyod 'jug shes rab le'u'i zin bris*, TKSB, vol. *ma*. There is also a similar set of notes on the same chapter of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* attributed to Gyaltsap in TKSB, vol. *pha*. This second work appears to be almost exactly the same as chapter 9 of Gyaltsap's own commentary on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* entitled *rGyal sras 'jug ngogs*.
43 *dBu ma rgyan kyi brjed byang*, TKSB, vol. *ba*. This is a brief exposition of *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* written by Tsongkhapa himself. There are also lecture notes on the same Indian text taken by Gyaltsap entitled *rGyal tsab chos rjes rje la gsan pa'i dbu ma rgyan gyi brjed byang*, TKSB, vol. *ma*.
44 TKSB, vol. *tsha*. Included in this are *dBu ma'i lta khrid bsdus pa, dBu ma thal gyur ba'i lugs kyi zab lam dbu ma'i lta khrid*, and *Sris zhi mnyam myid kyi lta ba'i khrid*, and Khedrup's notes entitled *dBu ma thal gyur ba'i lugs kyi zab lam dbu ma'i lta khrid*.
45 *Tshad ma'i brjed byang chen mo*, TKSB, vol. *pha*.
46 *Yid dang kun gzhi'i dka' gnad rgya cher 'grel pa legs bshad rgya mtsho* (*KK*), TKSB, vol. *tsha*. Gareth Sparham opines that this text was composed either in 1386 or around 1388–9. See Sparham (1993), p. 19.
47 *Legs bshad gser phreng* (*LS*), TKSB, vols. *tsa* and *tsha*. Completed in 1388. Sparham has suggested that this date is perhaps too early and should be revised to 1392. Ibid., p. 17.
48 An earlier version of this section appeared as an article under the title 'Tsongkhapa's Qualms about Early Tibetan Interpretations of Madhyamaka' in *The Tibet Journal*. See Jinpa (1999).
49 *dGe sbyor gyi gnad la dri ba snyan bskul ba lhag bsam rab dkar*, TKSB, vol. *ka*. Interestingly, many of the expressions and arguments found in this letter closely resemble several critical sections in Khedrup's *lTa khrid mun sel sgron me* (Collected Works, vol. *ta*), as well as the last section of *Thub bstan byi dor* (Collected Works, vol. *ta*). It seems as if Khedrup is repeating many of Tsongkhapa's words. Note the polemical nature of the title of Khedrup's work.
50 *Byang chub lam rim chen mo*, TKSB, vol. *pha*.

51 Thuken, *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*, p. 158. Unfortunately, I have failed to locate Jhampa Lingpa's text.

52 *Dri ba lhag bsam rab dkar gyi dris lan man ngag gi dgongs rgyan. The Collected Works of gSer mdog Panchen*, vol. 23, pp. 297–358.

53 Pema Karpo's short response can be found in the last chapter of his *Phyag rgya chen po man ngag gi gan mdzod*, Collected Works, vol. 21.

54 *Lhag bsam rab dkar gyi dris lan dngos grub phreng ba* and *Lhag bsam rab dkar gyi lta sgom dris lan* in *Collected Works of Gomchen Ngawang Drakpa*, vol. 2. Reprinted by Ngawang Sopa, New Delhi, 1981.

55 *Dris lan blo bzang bzhad pa'i sgra dbyangs*. Collected Works, vol. *nga*.

56 Thuken, op. cit., p. 159.

57 'jam dbyangs bla mas rjes bzung zhes bgyi ba . . ., *Queries*, p. 41.

58 Thuken, op. cit., pp. 158–9.

59 Sangye Gyatso reads the letter as a critique of what he calls 'the so-called *mahāmudrā* that goes by the name of "new Drukpa [Kagyü]"' (*'brug gsar du grags pa'i phyag chen*), *A History of [the] Ganden [Tradition]*, p. 69. Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa makes the interesting observation that Tsongkhapa wrote this letter as a result of the deep disappointment he felt at the level of ignorance among some of the meditators at a Kagyü retreat. He writes: phyis ri khrod shin tu dben pa . . . dri ba lhag bsam rab dkar la sogs pa mdzad/. Tsuklak Trengwa, op. cit., p. 1155. Druk Gyalwang Chöje, in his biography of Tsongkhapa (pp. 489–90), makes a similar point to that made in *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*.

60 *rJe red mda' ba'i gsung lan*, TKSB, vol. *ka*.

61 *rJe tsun 'jam dpal dbyangs kyi lam gyi gnad rje red mda' ba la shog dril du phul ba*. TKSB, vol. *pha*.

62 I hope to undertake, as part of a future project, a critical study of this letter together with some of the main responses of subsequent Tibetan thinkers. As yet, my own translation of the letter remains unpublished.

63 Traditional Geluk scholarship seems to assign this historically critical role to Tsongkhapa's short ode, *Essence of Eloquence In Praise of Dependent Origination*. Thurman (1984, p. 85) asserts that the text was written in 1398. His claim is probably based on Khedrup's *Haven of Faith*, although Thurman does not say so. It is difficult to discern whether this date is accurate. Even if we accept it, it is far from clear whether Tsongkhapa really meant this ode to signal his departure from mainstream Tibetan Madhyamaka thought. On the surface, the text appears to be nothing more than a passionate expression of admiration of the Buddha for having taught the principles of dependent origination.

64 *LS*, vol. 1, pp. 411–15.

65 These are Ratnākaraṣānti's *Prajñāpāramītopadeśa*, P5459 and two *Bṛhaṭṭīkā*, P5205 and P5206, which Tsongkhapa attributes to certain Daṅṣṭasena, a student of Vasubandhu. On the use of the last two texts by the Jonangpas and Tsongkhapa's critical comments, see Ruegg (1969), pp. 325–7. Shakya Chokden takes issue with Tsongkhapa on the authorship of the last two texts and defends the earlier Tibetan attribution of them to Vasubandhu. See *Shing rta'i srol 'byed*, p. 484.

66 mchil ma'i thal ba bzhin du dor bar rigs so// *LS*, p. 415.

67 Chizuko Yoshimizu gives a similar list of Madhyamaka views that are regarded as false by the Gelukpas. She labels them as (1) The theory of annihilation

maintaining that nothing exists, (2) the theory of 'emptiness-of-other,' and (3) the theory that Madhyamaka admits neither the two kinds of reality (*bden gnyis*) nor anything established by valid cognition (*tshad grub*), and does not maintain any doctrinal system of his own (*rang lugs*). Although she cites Tsongkhapa's *LRC* as a source, her identification of these views are based primarily on Jamyang Shepa's *Grub mtha' chen mo*. See Yoshimizu (1993), pp. 202–207).

68 For a detailed examination of Tsongkhapa's understanding of the illusion-like nature of phenomena, see chapter 5.

69 Cabezón (1992), p. 7.

70 On this so-called 'no-thesis' interpretation of Madhyamaka, see later.

71 See *LTC*, pp. 121–45, and *LN*, pp. 171–3. For a contemporary study on the identification of the proponents of these four views see Yoshimizu (1993), pp. 207–217. Robert Thurman, in his footnote, bases his identification of the proponents of these views on Bhaso Chökyi Gyaltsen (1402–73) and Lobsang Phüntsok. However, Thurman misreads *LN*'s reference to *LTC* (pp. 121–45) where Tsongkhapa states that he had already dealt extensively with the refutations of the four positions. Thurman takes this to refer to Tsongkhapa's rebuttal of the four types of objections against the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness (*LTC*, pp. 50–89). See Thurman (1984), pp. 326–8, footnotes 112, 113, and 114. Although related, these are two quite distinct issues. One relates specifically to what Tsongkhapa sees as four main misreadings of Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka's ontological nominalism, while the rebuttal of the four objections in *LTC* is part of Tsongkhapa's overall argument against what Tsongkhapa regards as over-negation (*dgag bya ngos 'dzin khyab che ba*).

72 Paṇḍita de'i slob ma bo lo tsva ba dag ... *LTC*, p. 123.

73 *LCD*, folio 47.

74 da lta dbu ma thal 'gyur bar 'dod pa ... *LTC*, p. 124. *LCD* does not give any identification of the proponent of this third position.

75 Zla ba grags pa'i rjes su 'brang ba'i bod kyi mkhas pa kha cig ... *LTC*, p. 126.

76 On the problem of identifying this third object of Tsongkhapa's critique, see Williams (1985). See also Yoshimizu (1993).

77 Gal te ngas dam bcas 'ga' yod/
des na nga la skyon de yod/
nga la dam bca' med pas na/
nga ni skyon med kho na yin// *VV*, 29.

78 Yod dang med dang yod med ces/
gang la phyogs ni yod min pa/
de la yun ni ring po la'ang/
glan ka brjod par nus ma yin// *CS*, 16:25.

79 dBu ma pa yin na rang gi rgyud kyis rjes su dpag par rigs pa ma yin te/ phyogs gzhan khas blangs pa med pa'i phyir ro// *PSP*, p. 11. Tsongkhapa's reading of these passages from the three Indian Mādhyamika thinkers can be found in *LTC*, pp. 136–44.

80 See *LTC*, pp. 23–89. For Khedrup's critique of the 'no-thesis' view, see Cabezón (1992), pp. 102–12.

81 Ruegg (1983), Thurman (1984), Williams (1985), Napper (1989), and Cabezón (1994).

82 dbu ma pa'i khyad chos gcig po de khyed kyis bkag pa yin no// *LTC*, p. 36.

83 rang gi ngo bos med na med par 'dod par gsal te ... *LTC*, p. 38.

84 See Introduction, note 2.
85 lha bdud tu babs pa, *LTC*, p .33.
86 *LTC*, p. 38: de ltar ji srid du myu gu la sogs pa rnams yod par 'dod pa de sris du rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i yod par smra la rang gi ngos bos grub pa gtan med na gtan med du smra na ni mtha' gnyis su ltung bar gdon mi za bas dngos por smra ba'i go lugs dang khyad med pa yin te/
87 dbu ma pa la med pa pa'am chad 'ta ba zhes zer ro// *LTC*, p. 40.
88 *LTC*, p. 88: des na rgud pa thams cad kyi rtsa ba ni rang bzhin sgro 'dogs pa'i ma rig pa yin la/ de dang 'dzin stangs dngos su 'gal ba'i sgo nas de druns 'byin pa ni rang bzhin med pa'am bdag med pa rtogs pa'i shes rab nyag gcig yin ... Tsongkhapa cites from *CST* to make this point.
89 *LTC*, p. 48.
90 *naiḥsvābhāvyanirvṛttau svābhāvyaṃ hi prasiddhaṃ syāt//* *VV*, 26b.
Rang bzhin med pa nyid log na/
rang bzhin nyid du rab grub gyur// Quoted in *LTC*, p. 43.
91 Gendün Chöphel (1903–51) argues that the 'no-thesis' view need not be seen as so antithetical to Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka. He suggests an interesting reading of the view whereby a distinction is drawn between an assertion made for the sake of others (*gzhan ngo la bltos pa'i khas len*) and an assertion made from one's own perspective (*rang ngo'i khas len*). See *Ornament of Nāgājuna's Thought*, pp. 323–55. There are serious doubts concerning the authorship of some sections of this piece, which is a posthumous work purported to be a compilation of notes taken from Gendün Chöphel's lectures on Madhyamaka philosophy. Although *Ornament of Nāgājuna's Thought* does not mention its source, this distinction of two types of assertion is found also in Rongtön Shejha Künrik's writings. See, for example, his *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i nam bshad nges don rnam nges*, p. 72. Rongtön identifies three types of theses: (1) a thesis that is accepted for the sake of others under special circumstances, (2) a thesis accepted both by oneself and others, and (3) a thesis accepted only by oneself.
92 This will be addressed in chapter 2.
93 For a detailed study of this 'constructive' approach, see chapter 5.
94 The Tibetan text of the letter cited and translated here can be found in *Queries*, pp. 34–5. For fear of taking up too much space, I have decided against providing the entire Tibetan text here. As to the identity of the proponents of these views, further studies may shed new light. But even at this early stage it can be surmised that Tsongkhapa's primary concern in this letter appears to be that there still remained a strong legacy of Hva-shang's views in Tibet.
95 rnam rtog ma rig chen po ste/ Source unknown.
96 For a succinct discussion on the dispute between the proponents of 'intrinsic emptiness' (*rang stong*) and 'extrinsic emptiness' (*gzhan stong*), see Williams (1989), pp. 96–109. A more extensive discussion on the dispute based on Thuken Chökyi Nyima's *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long* can be found in Ruegg (1963). For a contemporary polemical work defending the 'extrinsic emptiness' view, see Hookham (1991).
97 Ibid., p. 27: kho bos ni de lta'i sgom de hva shang gi sgom lugs las khyad par gtan nas ma phyed do//
98 Ibid., pp. 227–61.
99 de lta ma yin na gnyid 'thug po log pa dang rgyal ba la sogs pa'i tshe yang ... Ibid., p. 231.

100 *Queries, p.* 37: nyams len la rste gcig tu gzhol 'dod kha cig ni thos bsam la gegs su 'dzin par 'dug/ yang thos bsam byed 'dod la la yang thog ma nas rang rgyud la sgom don 'tshol ba'i rtsis mi byed par gzhan smra dbab 'dod dang/ rang mkhas 'dod kyi grags skam sgrub pa'i bsam pas kha phyir ltas su shor nas ...

101 *GR*, p. 226: 'phags pa'i gzhung 'grel tshul la rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa rdul tsam med kyang/ bya byed 'thams cad bzhag pas chog pa'i 'grel tshul gyi lugs thun mong ma yin pa 'di la brten nas/ rnam par dag pa'i grub mtha' 'grel byed gzhan dang thun mong ma yin pa mang du yod te/ de gang zhe na re zhig gtso bo rnams brjod na/ tshogs drug las ngo bo tha dad pa'i kun gzhi rnam shes dang/ rang rig 'gog lugs thun mong ma yin pa dang/ rang rgyud kyi sbyor bas phyir rgol gyi rgyud la de kho na nyid kyi lta ba skyed pa khas mi len pa gsum dang/ shes pa khas len pa bzhin du phyi rol gyi don yang khas blang dgos pa dang/ nyan rang la dngos po rang bzhin med par rtogs pa yod pa dang/ chos kyi bdag 'dzin nyon mongs su 'jog pa dang/ zhig pa dngos po yin pa dang/ de'i rgu mtshan gyis dus gsum 'jog tshul thung mong ma yin pa sogs yin no//

102 See note 41.

103 rang mtshan khas mi len pa/ rnam mkhyen gyis ji snyed pa mkhyen tshul thun mong ma yin pa/ See *BTP*, p. 154.

104 *lTa ba'i shab 'byed*, folio 19b: zhig pa dngos po pa ni chos 'di pa las phyi rol du gyur pa mu stegs bye brag pa'i grub mtha' yin gyi/ nang pa'i grub mtha' la med pas shin tu mi 'thad pa'i gnas so// Taktsang Lotsawa too rejects Tsongkhapa's claim that the cessation of empirical things is a conditioned phenomenon. He argues that this assertion contradicts Tsongkhapa's own Madhyamaka analysis whereby things, such as a pot, are shown to be untenable when subjected to critical analysis. See Taktsang, op. cit., p. 235.

105 kun gzhi dang/ rang rig mi 'dod cing/ phyi don khas len pa'i tshul yang dpyad par bya ste/ ... *lTa ba'i shan 'byed*, p. 28a.

106 *Sher 'grel ke ta ka*, p. 31: bde sogs rang gis nyams su myong ba yang tha snyad du ji ltar 'gog ste mi 'gog go// des na sems bden grub tu 'dod pa la rang rig pa mi 'thad kyang bden med du 'dod pa la rang rig pa'i tha snyad shin tu 'thad par yang shes par bya ste ... For an in-depth study of Mipham's views on reflexive awareness, see Williams (1998).

107 Taktsang, op. cit., p. 155: gzhan dbang bden grub dang rang rig nan gyis bkag pa lta bu'i dgag pa gang du'ang ma mdzad do//

Chapter 2

1 An earlier version of the first six sections of this chapter appeared in *JIP* under the title 'Delineating Reasons's Scope for Negation: Tsongkhapa's Contribution to Madyamaka's Dialectical Method.' See Jinpa (1999).

2 Madhyamaka's four-cornered argument (*catuṣkoṭi*) has received extensive treatment in modern Buddhist scholarship. For an in-depth review of this literature, see Wood (1994).

3 One of the first modern scholars on Madhyamaka philosophy to characterize the tetralemma argument as 'dialectic' was T. R. V. Murti. Other contemporary Madhyamaka interpreters like Richard Robinson and David Seyfort Ruegg have followed his example.

4 See, for example, Murti (1955), p. 59. Interestingly, something like this seems to be Gorampa's view too. See *lTa ba'i shen 'byed*, folio 40a.

5 By essentialist I am referring to what Tsongkhapa calls *ngö ma wa* (*dngos smra ba*), which literally means 'one who propounds the existence of entity.' This should not be confused with an objective realist (*don smra ba*) as in the case of 'the two proponents of objective realism' (*don smra sde gnis*): the Vaibhāṣika and the Sautrāntika. I use 'objective realism' in that these two schools assert the objective reality of the external world rather than the real existence of universals. According to Tsongkhapa, the essentialists include, in addition to almost all ancient Indian non-Buddhist philosophical schools, the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, and Cittamātra schools of Buddhism. All of these schools accept in one form or another the existence of a truly real entity (*bden pa'i dngos po*). In the case of the Vaibhāṣikas, it is the irreducible *dharmas*, while for the Sautrāntikas it is the unique, indivisible particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), e.g., atoms, indivisible points of consciousness, and time. As for the Cittamātras, they accept the ultimate reality of consciousness, whether in the form of a foundational consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) or the self-cognizing, apperceptive faculty of all mental events (*svasaṃvedanā*).

6 In as much as this need for logical exhaustiveness seems to be necessary for satisfying the mind regarding the effectiveness of the proof, one could say that there is also a psychological element in the formulation of the *catuṣkoṭi* argument.

7 *LTC*, p. 83: dbu ma'i gzhung rnams nas dngos po'am rang bzhin yod pa dang med pa dang gnyis ka dang gnyis ka min pa'i mu bzhi thams cad bkag la/ der ma 'dus pa'i chos kyang med pas rigs pas thams cad 'gog go snyam na/ 'di ni sngar bstan pa ltar dngos po la gnyis las rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i dngos po ni bden pa gnyis gang du yod par 'dod kyang 'gog la/ don byed nus pa'i dngos po ni tha snyad du 'gog pa ma yin no// dngos po med pa'ang 'dus ma byas rnams la rang gi ngos bos grub pa'i dngos med du 'dod na ni de 'dra ba'i dngos ṃed kyang 'gog go// de bzhin du de 'dra ba'i dngos po yod med gnyis char yang 'gog la/ gnyis ka ma yin par rang gi ngo bos grub pa'ang 'gog pas mu bzhi 'gog tshul thams cad ni de ltar du shes par bya'o//

8 bdag las ma yin gzhan las min//
gnyis las ma yin rgyu med min//
dngos po gang dag gang na yang//
skye ba nam yang yod ma yin//

Na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyaṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ/
utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana// (*MMK*, 1:1)

9 don dam gyi skye ba khas len na de nyid dpyod pa'i rigs pas dpyad bzod du 'dod dgos la/ de'i tshe rigs pas bdag dang gzhan la sogs mu bzhi gang las skye dpyad [nas] dgogs pas don dam gyi skye ba 'dod pas mu bzhi gang rung gi dpyad pa nges par khas blang dgos so// ... *LTC*, p. 79.

10 Gadjin Nagao translates these two expressions respectively as 'truly reasoned understanding' and 'knowledge based on criteria.' See Nagao (1989), p. 125. Hopkins (1983), Napper (1989), and Cabezón (1994) discuss this critical distinction but do not, to my mind, fully appreciate its philosophical significance. Cabezón's treatment is philosophically more sophisticated than the other two, but his suggestion that the distinction should be read primarily as pertaining to a linguistic formulation of the doctrine of emptiness hinders one

from understanding what I have called the 'analytic' dimension of the distinction. For more on Cabezón's treatment of the distinction, see Cabezón (1994), pp. 161–6.

11 *Buddhapālitamūlamadhyamakavṛtti*. P5242, Vol. 95; Toh. 3842.

12 Those who are familiar with twentieth-century Western philosophy may note the parallels between this distinction and the Wittgensteinian notion of language games.

13 It is crucial to understand that here the Tibetan term *dpyod pa* (literally, analysis) covers both analysis and also, more importantly, the more general idea of discourse.

14 *LTC*, pp. 52–3: gzugs sgra la sogs pa kun rdzob pa 'di rnams yod du chug kyang de kho na la dpyod pa'am rang bzhin yod med dpyod pa'i rigs pas gtan mi grub pas de dag la rigs pa'i brtag pa mi 'jug go zhes slob dpon 'dis yang yang gsungs shing ... gal te rang bzhin yod med dpyod pa'i rigs pas 'di dag dgag par nus na gzugs dang tshor ba la sogs pa'i kun rdzob pa 'di dag la rigs pa'i brtag pa shin tu gzhug pa yin na de 'dra ba ni slob dpon 'di yi gzhung las rnam pa thams cad du bkag pas na ...

15 *LN*, pp. 141–2: 'di'i 'tshol tshul dang dpyod lugs snga ma ches mi 'dra ste/ 'dis ni 'gro 'ong byed mkhan dang 'gro 'ong gi tha snyad btags pa tsam gyis ma tshim par tha snyad de ltar btags pa'i don de gang yin dpyad nas 'gro 'ong dris pa min gyis/ 'gro 'ong gi tha snyad rang dga' bar 'jug pa la rang dga' ba'i brtag pa byas pa yin pas de'i brtag pa khas blangs pa la 'gal ba ci zhig yod//

16 *RG*, p. 32: mchod sbyin [chos sbyin] gyis gzugs mthong zhes pa dang mchod sbyin [chos sbyin] rdzas yod kyis gzugs mthong zhes pa'i tha snyad btags pa'i btags sa'i don de ji ltar yod btsal bas cung zad kyang mi rnyed pa la khyad par ci yang med kyang/ snga mas mthong ba tha snyad du med pa la tshad mas gnod la phyi mas mthong ba tshad mas dgag nus pas tha snyad du yo pa la tshad mas gnod pa'i phyir tha snyad du yod med gtan mi mtshungs so// de'i rgyu mtshan yang rdzas yod rigs pas btsal na rnyed dgos pas des ma rnyed na dgag nus la yod tsam rigs pas btsal na rnyed dgos pa min pas des ma rnyed pas 'gog mi nus pa'i phyir ro//
The insertions suggesting the correct spelling of Dharmadatta in Tibetan are mine.

17 rigs pa des gzugs sogs kyi skye ba dpyad bzod par ni kho bo cag mi 'dod pas bden dngos su thal ba'i skyon med do// *LTC*, p. 50.

18 See *LN*, pp. 214–18; *LTC*, pp. 50–58.

19 mthar thug dpyod byed, *LTC*, p. 50.

20 *CST*, P5266, p. 261:3: kho bo cag gi rnam par dpyod pa don rang bzhin tshol ba lhur byed pa nyid kyi phyir ro/ kho bo cag ni 'dir dngos po rnams rang gi ngo bos grub pa 'gog gi mig la sogs pa byas shing rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba las kyi rnam par smin pa ni mi 'gog pa'o//

21 *LTC*, p. 112.

22 *LN*, p. 140.

23 In *LTC*, Tsongkhapa devotes a whole section to explaining what exactly is meant by the all-important qualification 'from the ultimate perspective' (*don dam par*) when Mādhyamikas reject within their own ontology any notion at all of intrinsic existence. *LTC*, pp. 113–20.

24 *RG*, pp. 21, 48.

25 *GR* , p. 132: 'di legs par shes na gshis lugs la dang/ don dam du med zer ba dang/ yang chos nyid yod par 'dod cing de nyis gshis lugs dang don dam yin par smra ba mi 'gal ba'i gdnad rnams shes par 'gyur ro//

26 *RG*, p. 22: de'i phyir don dam dang chos nyid dang de kho na nyid dang gshis lugs rnams med par mi 'thad la/ yog na'ang de dag tu ma grub na gzhan gang du grub ces smra ba ni don dam par grub ma grub dpyod pa'i dpyod lugs kyi rnam pa ma chags pa'i gtam mo//

27 Ibid.

28 All of these examples have in common the grammatical case in which the prepositions (*la don*) such as *su, ra, ru, du,* and *tu* are used. Admittedly, Tsongkhapa himself does not draw attention to this linguistic form although he is fully versed in the intricacies of Tibetan grammar. However, the above quote (see note 25) provides good evidence for my case. It is interesting to note that Tsongkhapa seems to pay less attention to linguistic points in his writings that follow his period of maturity.

29 dgag bya legs par ngo bzung ba ... *LTC*, p. 23; *GR*, p. 130.

30 Tsongkhapa provides a lengthy treatment of the problems of over-negation and under-negation in *LTC*, pp. 23–97. See also Napper (1989), chapters 4 and 5.

31 *LTC*, p. 23.

32 ... dgag bya'i spyi legs por ma shar bar de rnams su grub pa mi srid ces pa'i brda 'jigs pa tsam la brten nas ... *LN*, p. 125. In some editions of *LN* the word *'jigs pa*, which literally means 'terrifying' (I have translated it as 'grand' here), is misspelt as *'jags pa*, i.e., without the vowel *i*. Thurman does not detect this error, which weakens his translation of the point Tsongkhapa is making with regard to the importance of having a prior, clear identification of the object of negation. For Thurman's translation, see Thurman (1984), p. 282.

33 don zhes bya ba ni shes par bya ba yin pa'i phyir don te brtag par bya ba dang go bar bya ba zhes bya ba'i tha tshig go// dam pa zhes bya ba ni ... don dam pa de yod pas don dam pa dang mthun pa'o// Cited in *LN*, p. 125.

34 *LN*, pp. 125–6.

35 des na 'di skad du don dam par skye ba med do zhes bya ba ni 'di dag yang dag par shes pas skye bar ma grub pa'o zhes bya ba yin no zhes bshad par 'gyur ro// Quoted in *LN*, pp. 126–7. It is interesting to note that although Tsongkhapa sees himself as a Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika following in the footsteps of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti, on number of critical points of Madhyamaka discourse Tsongkhapa relies heavily on Kamalaśīla's *Madhyamakāloka*. Further research may help us ascertain the extent of *Madhyamakāloka's* influence on Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka.

36 Gendün Chöphel questions the validity of the distinction between 'innate apprehension of self-existence' (*bdag 'dzin lhan skyes*) and 'intellectually acquired apprehension of self-existence' (*bdag 'dzin kun btags*). He argues that because there is nothing within human thought that is not conditioned by some form of reasoning process, to speak of 'innate conceptions' – that is, thoughts and perceptions not conditioned by intellectual thinking – is nonsensical. According to him, such types of conception, if there are any, can be found only in animals like birds. See *Ornament of Nāgājuna's Thought*, p. 336. In my view, Tsongkhapa's position is much subtler than what this criticism suggests. Tsongkhapa explicitly states that by speaking of non-analytic, naive worldly understanding, he is not precluding analysis *per se*.

What he is precluding are those analyses that seek to establish an intrinsic reality of things and events.

37 'o na don dam par med pa'i don gang yin snyam na/ ... *LTC*, pp. 116–20. See above, pp. 45–6.

38 *GR*, pp. 131–2: dgag bya la don dam gyi khyad par sbyar ba'i don dam de la gnyis su shes dgos te/ thos bsam sgom gsum gyi rigs shes la don dam du byas nas/ des sngar bshad pa ltar ma grub pa gcig dang/ blo'i dbang gis bzhag pa ma yin par don gyi sdod lugs su yod pa la/ don dam su yod par bzhag pa gnyis kyi dang po'i don dam dang/ de'i ngor grub pa yang yod la/ phyi ma'i don dam dang der yod pa gnyis ka yang mi srid do// des na phyi ma'i don dam du yod pa la snga ma'i don dam du yod pas khyab kyang/ snga ma'i yod 'dzin ni lhan skyes kyi bden 'dzin min la/ de'i bden 'dzin la ni phyi ma'i yod 'dzin dgos so//

The above quotation is considered to be one of the most obscure passages in *GR* and generates, to this day, much discussion within the Geluk monastic colleges. My interpretation is informed by what I see as Tsongkhapa's overall project of delineating the parameters of negation in Madhyamaka reasoning.

39 *GR*, pp. 140–1: dbu ma rang rgyud pa rnams bden pa sogs gsum du grub pa shes bya la mi srid par bzhed kyang/ rang gi ngo bos grub pa sogs gsum ni tha snyad du yod par bzhed de/ ...

40 brtag pa'i dngos la ma reg par/
de yi dngos med 'dzin ma yin/

> Without touching the imagined entity,
> its nonactuality cannot be [cognized].

Perhaps the earliest textual evidence from Tsongkhapa underlining the philosophical point about the critical importance of clearly identifying the object of negation is his *Queries*, p. 15. Interestingly, in this text Tsongkhapa does not cite Śāntideva's verse. Tsongkhapa begins to cite this verse only starting in *LTC*. For a detailed survey of this divergent reading of *BCA*, 9:139ab by Tibetan commentators, see Williams (1998), chapter 4.

41 The following is the passage that Tsongkhapa quotes from *Madhyamakāloka*: dngos po yang dag par ngo bo ñyid med pa dag la yang de las ldog pa'i rnam par sgro 'dogs pa'i 'khrul pa'i blo gang yin pa de ni kun rdzob ces bya ste/ 'di'am 'dis de kho na nyid mthong ba la sgrib pa lta bur byed/ 'gebs pa lta bur byed pa'i phyir ro// ... de'i phyir de dag gi bsam pa'i dbang gis dngos po rdzun pa'i ngo bo thams cad ni kun rdzob tu yod pa kho na'o zhes bya'o//
Quoted in full in *GR*, p. 130; referred to in *LN*, p. 128.

42 *LTC*, p. 23. In *Queries*, p. 15, Tsongkhapa uses the process of identifying a thief as an analogy.

43 *GR*, p. 222.

44 *LN*, p. 186.

45 That Tsongkhapa is aware of this concept of 'true assumption' (*yid dpyod*) or 'intellectual understanding' as opposed to true knowledge is evident from *lDe bdun la 'jug pa'i sgo don gnyer yid kyi mun sel*, TKSB, vol. *tsha*. The notion must have evolved from Ngog Loden Sherap and Chapa's Sangphu school. Interestingly, Sakya Paṇḍita subjects this notion to detailed criticism and suggests that it is an unnecessary epistemological category. See *Rigs gter rang 'grel*, pp. 172–3. On key differences between Chapa and Sapaṇ's epistemological views, see Van der Kuijp (1983) and Dreyfus (1997).

46 See *Pramāṇavārttika*, "Svatantrānumāna," verses 5 and 6.

47 rigs pas ma brnyed pa dang rigs pas bkag pa/ *RG*, p. 32; *LN*, p. 215; *LTC*, p. 51. Gendün Chöphel takes issue with this distinction, too. He argues that if the sense of 'non-finding' here is nothing more than that of a visual perception's inability to hear sounds, then surely one could say that inanimate objects like earth and pebbles never 'find' absolute existence. In that case, he contends, we must accept that these objects have long since attained true liberation (*Ornament of Nāgārjuna's Thought*, p. 338). Again, we can see here that this criticism trades on a certain caricature of Tsongkhapa's views. I think that Tsongkhapa is making a philosophically valid point when he draws our attention to the distinction between that which is not found (*ma brnyed pa*) and that which is negated (*bkag pa*).

48 *LN*, p. 215: de dag zhib tu 'byed pa'i dpyad pa ma rdzogs par rig pa ltar snang res don dam du grub pa bkag cing/ kun rdzob to yod pa rnams 'khrul shes res yod par bzung na de'i ngor yod pa tsam gyis 'jog nus te/ de'i don ni 'khrul ngor yod pa tsam yin pa'i phyir ro snyam du bsam na ni/ dbang phyug dang gtso bo la sogs las bde sdug skye ba dang dkar nag gi las gnyis las kye ba gnyis 'thad na 'thad snyam dang mi 'thad na'ang mi 'thad mnyam du 'gro ste/ sngar bzhin dpyad na ni dpyod byed kyis phyi ma yang mi rnyed la 'khrul ngor ni snga ma yang yod pa'i phyir ro//

49 See, for example, Matilal (1971), p. 164; and Huntington (1989), p. 98.

50 I shall deal with Tsongkhapa's resolution of this 'paradox' in a later chapter. The question later assumes an even greater significance in the context of how Tsongkhapa reconstructs the notion of person following the deconstruction of the concept of self.

51 *LTC*, p. 222.

52 See p. 54.

53 *LN*, pp. 220–7; *RG*, pp. 39–41; *GR*, pp. 148–50. *LTC* is an interesting exception to this. It seems that although Tsongkhapa is clear that the Madhyamaka's emptiness is best understood in terms of a non-implicative negation, it was only when he began to write *LN* that he seems to have appreciated the full significance of this point.

54 Searle (1969), pp. 32–3. As Kajiyama points out, it is well known amongst contemporary scholars that the theory of two kinds of negation was developed by ancient Indian grammarians and logicians. For a biblographical reference to some of the contemporary studies on the Indian theory of negations, see Kajiyama (1973), p. 162, note 1.

55 'dir ni yod nyid dgog pa ste/ med nyid yongs su 'dzin pa min/ nag po min zhes smras pa na/ dkar po yin zhes ma brjod bzhin// Quoted in *LN*, p. 225 and also in *RG*, p. 49. Tsongkhapa attributes this verse to Nāgārjuna and states that according to Avalokitavrata the verse is in Nāgārjuna's *Lokātītastava*. However, the verse cannot be found in the Tibetan translation that exists in the *tangyur* collection. Bhāvaviveka quotes this verse in his *Prajñāpradīpa* (thus reinforcing the impression that it is from Nāgārjuna) but does not give its source.

56 dgag pa don gyis bstan pa dang/
tshig gcig sgrub par byed pa dang/
de ldan rang tshig mi ston pa/
ma yin gzhan pa gzhan yin no//

Negations that show [another] implicitly,
or by an explicit term,
or through both, or not by its own name
are implicative; the others are different.

Quoted by Tsongkhapa in both his *LN*, p. 222, and in *GR*, p. 149. Kajiyama asserts that Bhāvaviveka was the first to emphasise the significance of the discrimination between these two forms of negations in Buddhist philosophy. Kajiyama (1973), p. 162, and 167.

57 The above enumeration and examples of the four negations are from Tsongkhapa. See *LN*, p. 221; *RG*, pp. 39–41. For the Tibetan names of these four implicative negations, see note 56. For a contemporary work on the Geluk theories about negations, see Klein (1990). Interestingly, Kajiyama (1973, p. 170) reads this passage from Avalokitavrata as presenting 'four characteristics' of implicative negation' as opposed to four kinds of implicative negation.

58 This is in fact how many contemporary Western scholars on Tibetan Buddhism have understood the distinction between negation and affirmation.

59 See, for example, Matilal (1985), p. 18.

60 These examples given here are from Matilal. Ibid., p. 18.

61 A brief examination of Tsongkhapa's critique of the alleged Madhyamaka 'no-thesis' view, which can be seen as a Tibetan version of the Madhyamaka so-called 'non-committal' stance, was undertaken in chapter 1.

62 See, for example, Ruegg (1977), p. 36.

63 *LN*, p. 141.

64 Murti (1955) and Stcherbatsky (1968) seem to subscribe to this view.

65 Tsongkhapa often uses the onto-epistemological term 'established' (*grub pa*) in place of the simple existential term 'existence' (*yod pa*) to characterize these objects of negation. Of the above list, Tsongkhapa suggests that while the Prāsaṅgika rejects all of them, the Svātantrika would accept numbers 1, 2, and 3 as being tenable. See *GR*, p. 140.

66 rang bzhin 'gog pa'i rtags kyis bsgrub bya med dgag yin pa dang ... dbu ma thal rang la khyad par yod pa ma yin no// Ibid., p. 43. In fact, as Kajiyama points out, Bhāvaviveka asserts that negation used by a Mādhyammika must be the non-implicative one. Kajiyama (1973), p. 172.

67 See Williams (1983), p. 134, for Mikyö Dorje's critique, for example.

68 In his *lTa ba'i shen 'byed*, p. 1, Gorampa lists Tsongkhapa's view of emptiness as nihilism.

69 *dBu ma'i byung tshul*, p. 247. Many of Shakya Chokden's critiques of Tsongkhapa's view of emptiness, at least the latter ones, seem to be based on the premise that the Shentong Madhyamaka view represents the apex of the Madhyamaka philosophy of emptiness. He sees Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu as the principal figures representing this 'highest' Madhyamaka teaching. A detailed discussion of Shakya Chokden's critiques of Tsongkhapa, however interesting and philosophically engaging, lie beyond the scope of our current study.

70 Williams (1992), p. 204.

71 *LTCh*, p. 731. It is interesting that in *LTC* Tsongkhapa seems to posit that the mere absence of intrinsic being that is the content of an inferential cognition (*rigs shes rjes dpag*) is a similitude of the ultimate object (*don dam rjes mthun*),

and is thus not the genuine ultimate object (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*). He writes, 'rigs shes kyi gzhal bya ni don dam bden pa dang mthun pas don dam zhes btags par ... don dam bden par mi bzhed pas legs pa min no//' *LTC*, pp. 15–16. This view is based on a distinction between a 'similitude' (*rjes mthun*) and a 'genuine ultimate referent' (*don dam mtshan nyid pa*) found in Śāntarakṣita's *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* and Kamalaśīla's *Madhyamakāloka* (P5287). In *LTCh*, however, Tsongkhapa takes a different reading of this distinction. He argues that the distinction between a similitude and a genuine ultimate referent should not be understood in such a way as to suggest that there is a difference in the content of an inferential cognition of emptiness and the content of an *ārya*'s gnosis. Tsongkhapa suggests that the difference lies in the perspectives of the two cognitions, and argues that the basis on which the above distinction is drawn is related with the dissolution of two distinct types of elaboration (*spros pa/prapañca*), namely, the elaboration of substantial reality (*bden pa'i spros pa*) and the perception of duality (*snang ba'i spros pa*). While an *ārya*'s transcendent awareness is said to be free of both elaborations, an inferential cognition of emptiness is said to be free of only the elaborations of substantial reality. Although Geluk commentators, on the whole, interpret *LTC*'s reading of this distinction as being in harmony with *LTCh*, it seems clear to me that the two readings are diametrically opposed. *LTCh*'s reading seems to represent a complete reversal in Tsongkhapa's thought on this issue from his earlier position as put forth in *LTC*. See *LTCh*, pp. 731–3. Regarding standard Geluk hermeneutics on this issue, see Shamar Gendün Tenzin's *Lhad mthong dka' 'grel*, folios 12–15a.

72 *LN*, p. 158: des na dbu ma'i rigs pa thams cad ni 'khor ba'i rtsa ba ma rig pa'i 'dzin stangs sun dbyung ba'i yan lag yin pas/ rang rgyud kyi lhan skyes kyi ma rig pas ji ltar bzung ngos zin par byas la de nyid 'gog pa la brtson par bya yi/ grub mtha' smra ba dang gshags 'gyed pa tsam gyi mkhas pa la dga' bar mi bya'o//

73 Ibid., p. 142: des na ma dpyad pa'i lhan skyes kyi bdag 'dzin yul dang bcas pa rigs pa'i dgag bya gtso bo yin pa dang/ gzhung rnams nas dpyad nas dgog pa sha stag 'byung ba'ang mi 'gal bas kun btags kyi 'dzin pa yul bcas kho na 'gog go snyam du mi gzung ngo//

74 Hopkins (1983), part 5, gives an extensive treatment of the debate on the autonomy of reason between the two Madhyamaka schools as represented by Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti. His discussion of the issue is based extensively on the works of Jamyang Shepa Ngagwang Tsöndrü (1648–1722), the respected author of the philosophical textbooks of Gomang College of Drepung Monastic University. Cabezón (1994) provides a clear exposition of the debate based on Khedrup's *TTC*. A treatment of the issue from Tsongkhapa's own perspective can be found in Thurman (1984), pp. 90–111 (introduction) and pp. 321–44 (translation). However, Thurman's exposition is highly interpretive as he seems mainly concerned with demonstrating the close parallels of this ancient debate with the modern-day private language argument found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. It is unfortunate that Thurman's discussion of the central issue of methodology in Madhyamaka philosophy is obscured by his enthusiasm for developing a Wittgensteinian reading of Tsongkhapa. For a critical review of Thurman's comparative enterprise, see Williams (1986).

75 Tsongkhapa contends that Bhāvaviveka criticises Buddhapālita's assumption that with regard to an acceptance of the independent reality of reason, there is

no difference between himself and Buddhapālita. It is because of this, Tsongkhapa argues, that Bhāvaviveka fails to realize that there is actually a substantive philosophical difference between his own understanding of 'selfhood' (*bdag*) of persons and its factors of existence, and that of Buddhapālita (*LN*, p. 170). Tsongkhapa also observes the curious fact that although Avalokitavrata seems aware of Candrakīrti's critique of Bhāvaviveka, he does not respond to the criticisms. Similarly, Tsongkhapa states that Śāntarakṣita and Kamalaśīla should have responded to Candrakīrti's critique of autnomous syllogism, but they too do not appear to have done so. See *LN*, p. 170.

76 As can be inferred from my choice of the expression 'autonomy of reason,' I am reading Tsongkhapa and Candrakīrti's rejection of the autonomous inference (*rang rgyud kyi rjes dpag*) as refuting the thesis that reason possesses an absolute, objective ontological status. 'Reason' must be understood here in the narrow context of logical argumentation. It seems that this dispute has some parallels with the modern-day debate in Anglo-American philosophy between the proponents of what is known as 'intuitionist logic' and those who believe in the independent status of logic. Cabezón draws parallels between the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika views on logic and what he calls the essentialist and pragmatist positions in Western philosophical thought. See Cabezón (1994), pp. 143–4. *LTC* and *LN* are the only two among Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka classics that deal explicitly with Tsongkhapa's critique of the autonomy of reason. Apart from a few variations, Tsongkhapa's interpretations in *LTC* and *LN* of the section in the *Prasannapadā* that deals with this topic are in harmony. In fact, one complements the other so well that both texts must be read in conjunction to understand the full complexity of Tsongkhapa's argument. On variants in interpretation between *LTC* and *LN* on key passages of *Prasannapadā* regarding the critique of 'commonly established locus,' see Hopkins (1983), pp. 825–30.

77 chos can ni rgol ba gnyis kas khyad par gyi chos dpyod pa'i gzhi yin pas gnyis ka'i mthun snang du grub pa zhig dgos pa'i phyir ro// *LTC*, p. 146. On the problematics of reading Candrakīrti's defence of Buddhapalita's negation of self-origination against Bhāvaviveka's critiques, see Ruegg (1991), pp. 290–297.

78 For a detailed analysis of the concept of intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*), see chapter 3.

79 For example, see *Pramāṇavārttika*, 'Pramāṇasiddhi,' verse 1a.

80 *LN*, p. 180: rtog pa dang rtog med kyi tshad ma gang yin kyang tshad mar song sa snang yul dang zhen yul rang mtshan la ma khrul ba zhig dgos so//

81 Within the Geluk exegetical tradition, this is known as 'the critique of the commonly appearing subject' (*chos can thun snang ba 'gog pa*).

82 *LTC*, p. 156. The analogy is mine. Tsongkhapa merely points out that if there can be a commonly established locus, the argument would be redundant.

83 *LN*, pp. 183–4; *LTC*, p. 149.

84 Guy Bugault (1983), p. 57.

85 *LTC*, p. 162.

86 *LN*, pp. 184-s5.

87 Ibid., p. 180.

88 Ibid., p. 180.

89 Ruegg (1991) persuasively demonstrates how, in Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka epistemology, valid cognition (*pramāṇa*; Tib: *tshad ma*) is assured without

being based upon a 'substantially conceived diad of *pramāṇa* and *prameya* (nor on a substantially conceived triad consisting of the former pair together with a cognizer or *pramātṛ*), as did the system criticized by Nāgārjuna.' Ruegg (1991), p. 50

90 Ibid., p. 187; *LTC*, p. 162.

91 Paul Feyerabend makes a similar point, though in a different way. In his *Against Method*, he asserts that 'even the most puritanical rationalist will then be forced to stop reasoning and to use *propaganda* and *coercion*, not because some of his reasons have ceased to be valid, but because the *psychological conditions* which make them effective, and capable of influencing others, have disappeared.' Feyerabend (1975), p. 16.

92 David P. Jackson points out that Sakya Paṇḍita held the view that there is no distinction between the Prāsaṅgika and Svātantrika schools in their understanding of the nature of *paramārtha* (ultimate truth), and that the difference between the two Madhyamaka schools lies in their views at the level of *vyavahāra*, i.e., transactional or conventional truth. Jackson then goes on to suggest that the modern Sakya position on this question remains the same. See Jackson (1985). If this is the case, Tsongkhapa's contention that the rejection of intrinsic existence (*svabhāva*) is what principally distinguishes the two schools must have been seen as heterodox during his time. In fact, Gorampa takes issue with Tsongkhapa on this point. See *lTa ba'i gshen 'byed*, folio 17b–18a.

93 For Tsongkhapa's views on the illusion-like nature of reality, see chapter 5.

Chapter 3

1 Many of the basic principles of the Buddhist doctrine of no-self have received extensive treatment in contemporary scholarship. This study will concentrate on the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka's unique deconstruction of the self as understood by Tsongkhapa. For the standard Buddhist account of no-self, I would like to draw the reader's attention to Steven Collins' excellent study of the Theravāda understanding of no-self (Collins, 1982), and to Duerlinger (1989), which is a translation of the ninth chapter of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*.

2 For example, in *LN* Tsongkhapa devotes a whole section to demonstrating that the self that is negated within the context of standard Buddhist critiques of self is a coarse level (*rags pa*) of selfhood. See the section later in this chapter entitled 'Inadequacies in the Buddhist reductionist theory of no-self,' pp. 80–82.

3 *LTC*, p. 110: de ltar na rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin tsam la bdag tu bzhag pa dang nga'o snyam pa tsam gyi blo'i yul la bdag tu byas pa gnyis las/ dang po ni rigs pa'i dgag bya yin la phyi ma ni tha snyad du 'dod pas mi 'gog go//

4 Parfit (1984), pp. 210–13. The above summation of Parfit's definition of reductionist and non-reductionist theories of persons is based on Duerlinger (1993), pp. 81–2.

5 Duerlinger also suggests that Candrakīrti is a non-reductionist. See Duerlinger (1993), p. 81.

6 Tsongkhapa's understanding of the non-Buddhist theories of persons is based only on the writings of the Indian Buddhist thinkers whose works include lengthy critique of the tenets of the non-Buddhist schools. Of these works, most

noteworthy are Bhāvaviveka's *Tarkajvālā* (P5256), Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* (P5764) and its *Pañjikā* (P5765) by Kamalaśīla, and Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* and its *Bhāṣya*.

7 *GR*, p. 362: ji ltar grangs can dag gis bdag khas blangs pa de bzhin du/ bdag de'i dbye ba cung zad cung zad la brten nas mu stegs can rnams kyi lugs ni tha dad par 'gyur te/ 'di lta ste bye brag pa rnams ni blo dang bde ba dang sdug bsngal dang/ 'dod pa dang sdang ba dang 'bad pa dang chos dang chos ma yin pa dang bya ba'i shugs te/ bdag gi yon tan dgu smra bar byed do// ... Matilal also states that apart from Buddhists, '... all other schools of Indian philosophy (except the Cārvākas, of course) believe in the metaphysical reality of the soul, although each has a different notion about its ultimate nature as well as about how it is or could be shown to exist.' Matilal (1989), p. 62.

8 In the Western philosophical tradition the strongest proponents of a similar non-reductionist position appear to be Thomas Reid, Joseph Butler, and in our time, the philosophers Richard Swinburne and Roderick Chisolm. For a concise discussion of their views, see Geoffrey Madell (1981).

9 grub mthas blo ma bsgrur ba la med do// *LN*, p. 159.

10 Despite efforts, I have failed to find any Sanskrit equivalent for the Tibetan phrase 'rang skya thub pa'i rdzas yod kyi bdag' in any of the classical Indian sources.

11 de ni phyi rol pas phung po las don gzhan du kun btags pa'i ... *LN*, p. 148.

12 This metaphor may have been derived from the sūtras wherein the person is sometimes compared to a carrier (*khur ba po*) and the aggregates to a burden, or load (*khur*). Interestingly, Tsongkhapa suggests in his *Notes on the 'Wisdom' Chapter* that it is this belief in the self as some kind of a master that is the source of the non-Buddhist's theory of self as an independent entity. See *Notes on the 'Wisdom' Chapter*, folio 15b.

13 *RG*, p. 214.

14 *GR*, p. 191.

15 Ibid.

16 gang zag rdzas su yod pa ... Cangkya, op. cit., p. 125.

17 *GR*, p. 368: de yang lugs de dag gis nyan rang gis gang zag rdzas yod du med par rtogs par 'dod kyang/ rnam shes gnyis po rdzas yod du med par rtogs par mi 'dod pas/ gang zag rang skya thub pa'i rdzas su med par smra ba ni gang zag rang gi ldog pas 'dod pa yin gyi gang zag gi mthsan gzhi rnam shes la de ltar 'dod pa min no//

18 *A Succinct Guide to the Middle View*, in *BTP*, p. 117: gang zag tsam dgag par bya ba ma yin na/ khyad par gang dang bcas pa yin snyam na/ mdo sde mang por bden pa ba 'gog ces pa dang gzhi bsdu bar don dam pa dang/ rnam par gtan la dbab pa bsdu ba dang/ mdo rgyan dang mdzod 'grel rnams su rdzas yod 'gog ces kun don gcig pas ... de lta bu la mi bltos pa ni brtags par rang dbang du 'char ba ni rdzas su yod pa zhes bya'o//

19 *Pramāṇavārttika* (P5709), "Pramāṇasiddhi," verse 247. The Tibetan version of the verse reads as follows:

mchog gzhan don du gnyer phyir dang/
skye 'jig blo can nyid kyi phyir/
skye bo 'di yis dbang sogs las/
bdag ni tha dad gyur par shes//

The elaborated thought experiment cited here is based on Gyaltsap's commentary on the verse from *rNam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, chapter 2, p. 324. It is interesting that Tsongkhapa alludes to this argument of *Pramāṇavārttika* only in a minor text and not in any of his major works. Tsongkhapa writes: lhan skyes la 'ang phung po las don gzhan pa'i bdag kho na snang ste/ phung po 'di dor nas bzang ba gzhan don du gnyer gyi bdag dor bar mi 'dod pa'i phyir/ *A Succinct Guide to the Middle View*, *BTP*, p. 125.

20 Gyaltsap, *rNam bshad thar lam gsal byed*, vol. 1, p. 324. The use of a thought experiment as a device to analyse our intuitive notions of personal identity is well known in Anglo-American analytic philosophical discussions.

21 *MA*, 6:146; *GR*, pp. 391–2. A more detailed description of the Vātsīputrīyas' notion of the substantial reality of self and its critique can be found in *AKBh*. See Duerlinger (1989), pp. 138–63.

22 For English translations of the chapter see Stcherbatsky (1986) and James Duerlinger (1989).

23 *LN*, pp. 146–8: gang zag gi bdag med ni rang sde theg pa che chung gi grub mtha' smra ba gzhan gyi ltar na gang zag phung po dang mtshan nyid mi mthun pa'i rang skya thub pa'i rdzas su med pa tsam la 'dod do// ... zla ba'i lugs kyis de 'dra'i gang zag rdzas yod khegs kyang gang zag tha snyed du btags pa tsam min pa'i rang gi ngo gos grub pa mi khegs la de yod par 'dzin pa gang zag bden 'dzin yin pas gang zag gi bdag 'dzin yin te chos kyi bdag 'dzin bzhin no// Duerlinger makes a similar observation in Duerlinger (1993), p. 9. From Tsongkhapa's point of view, the no-self (*anātman*) theory of Theravāda Buddhism cannot be significantly different from that presented in *AKBh*.

24 de yang dang por nga'o snyam pa'i dmigs pa nga rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub par bzung ba na/ bdag la chags pa skye/ ... *LTCh*, p. 680.

25 gang zag gi bdag 'dzin yang gan zag rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub par 'dzin par bzhed la/ ... *LTCh*, p. 676.

26 chos tham bcad bdag med do zhes gsungs pa la bdag med pa zhes bya ba ni ngo bo nyid med pa'i don te bdag ces bya ba'i sgra ni ngo bo nyid kyi tshig yin pa'i phyir ro//. Quoted in full by Tsongkhapa in his *LN*, p. 144, and referred to in *RG*, p. 28. Interestingly, Lokesh Chandra gives the Tibetan term *rang gi ngo bo nyid* (intrinsic being) as the translation for the Sanskrit words *ātman*, *svabhāva*, and *svarūpa*, which suggests that there are close etymological associations between these terms. See *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 2207.

27 de la bdag ces bya ba ni/ gang zhig dngos po rnams kyi gzhan la rag ma las pa'i ngo bo rang bzhin te de med pa ni bdag med pa'o// De ni chos dang gang zag gi dbye ba gnyis su rtogs te chos kyi bdag med pa dang gang zag gi bdag med pa'o// ... *CST*. Quoted by Tsongkhapa in both *LN* and *RG*.

28 rag ma las kyi ngo bo ni ming du btags pa tsam min par don gyi sdod lugs yod pa rang dbang ba'i ngo bo'o// ... *LN*, *p*. 143.

29 Steven Collins makes a similar observation in the context of the Theravāda understanding of the doctrine of *anātman*. He lists three distinct uses of the first-person terms: (1) as a reflexive pronoun in a narration; (2) as a religious exhortation with regard to character description, which he calls a 'resonant use'; and (3) as a theoretical construct which is refuted by the Buddhists. See Collins (1982), p. 74.

30 *LN*, p. 140.

31 *GR*, p. 191.

32 theg pa che chung gi grub mtha' smra ba la thun mong du grags pa'i gang zag gi bdag med/ *GR*, p. 60.
33 Ibid., p. 60. *Notes on the 'Wisdom' Chapter* (folio 19b) states that as long as any of the five aggregates is conceived as the self, no complete deconstruction of selfhood has taken place.
34 *LN*, p. 148.
35 Ibid. This is reminiscent of Candrakīrti's argument in *MA*, 6:130.
36 Candrakīrti raises a similar objection in *MA*, 6:140–1.
37 Tsongkhapa develops the Prāsaṅgikas' own theory of delusions in *GR*, pp. 190–5.
38 med rgyu'i bdag gcig nyid gzhi gang zag dang chos kyi steng du bkag pa la bdag med gnyis su 'jog pas bdag gnyis kyang gzhi so so'i dbye bas bzhag gi bdag la khyad par med do// *RG*, p. 28.
39 *LN*, p. 209: de yang gan la nga'o snyam a skye ba'i dmigs pa gang zag dang de'i rgyud kyi chos gnyis la bdag gnyis su mngon par zhen pa 'ching byed kyi gtso bo yin pas/ rigs pas gang du bdag tu 'dzin pa 'gog pa'i gzhi'i gtso bo yang de gnyis yin no// de'i phyir rigs pa rnams kyang bdag gnyis 'gog par 'du zhing/
40 rnam lnga'i rigs pa/ rnam bdun gyi rigs pa/ For a detailed exposition of these points see *MMK*, 18:1–3; 22:1–10, and *MA*, 6:121–44. Tsongkhapa's own treatment of these analyses can be found in *GR*, pp. 359–406 and *LTC*, pp. 171–204. For an English translation of the section on the sevenfold reasoning from *PSP*, see Wilson (1983).
41 *MMK*, 22:1; *MA*, 6:122–55. Traditionally, these arguments are presented by drawing parallels to a chariot. As the chariot analogy also plays a crucial role in illustrating the nominal reality of persons, I shall discuss it in the next chapter.
42 Although in *LTC* Tsongkhapa deals with the refutation of the independent self subsequent to his critique of the self/aggregate identity thesis, I have chosen to follow the sequence of *GR* where it is approached first. In doing so, Tsongkhapa is following Candrakīrti's *MA*.
43 rta ba lang las gzhan du grub pa ba lang gi mtshan nyid dang ldan pa min pa bzhin no// *LTC*, p. 189.
44 rtag pa 'gyur ba med pa la ci yang byar med pas bdag tu btags pa don med par 'gyur te/ ... Tsongkhapa credits Buddhapālita with this argument in *LTC*, pp. 189–90.
45 *LTC*, p. 190. Tsongkhapa cites from both Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti to make this point.
46 *GR*, p. 364. This argument is similar to that which James Duerlinger calls Vasubandhu's 'selfless persons argument' (SPA). In this argument it is claimed that 'the name and concept of a person are known not to be applicable to a self because a self is not known by direct perception or sound inference to exist among the phenomena on the basis of which a person is named and conceptualised.' Duerlinger (1993), p. 90. Duerlinger argues that we need not accept the SPA as it stands, for there is nothing to demonstrate in Vasubandhu's formulation of the argument 'that what is not known to exist is known not to exist.' Duerlinger (1993), p. 91. I do not think that Tsongkhapa is open to this objection. As I have attempted to show in chapter 2, Tsongkhapa himself underlined repeatedly the importance of appreciating the distinction between that which is 'not found' and that which is 'found not to exist.'

47 des na phung po bdag las ngo bo tha dad na 'brel ba gnyis ka med pas 'brel med du 'gyur la ... *GR*, pp. 364–5. Tsongkhapa attributes this argument to Candrakīrti (*MA*, 6:124a) and sees it as based on *MMK*, 27:7.
48 See *MA*, 6:32.
49 *LN*, p. 151.
50 *LTC*, p. 190.
51 mu stegs pa rnams phung po las don gzhan pa'i bdag sgro 'dogs pa ni bdag ming tsam du ma rtogs shing/ ... *LTC*, p. 190.
52 'dir pha rol pos btags yod kyi dngo po rnams rang skya thub pa'i rdzas yod re gdags gzhir yod pa la brten nas 'dogs par khas len shing/ ... *GR*, p. 396.
53 For an explanation of the notion of degrees of reality conceived of in the Buddhist realist (Abhidharma) ontology, see Williams (1981).
54 bdag tu smra ba don med par thal ba/ *LTC*, p. 183. Tsongkhapa credits Nāgārjuna with this argument.
55 Nye bar len pa ma gtogs pa'i/
bdag yod ma yin byas pa'i tshe/
nye bar len pa ma gtogs par/
khyod kyi bdag ni yod ma yin//

Upādāna-vinirmukto nāsty ātmeti kṛte sati/
syād upādānam evātmā nāsti cātmeti vaḥ punaḥ// *MMK*, 27:5.

For a detailed comment on this passage from Tsongkhapa see *RG*, p. 466.
56 bdag mang por 'gyur ba/ *LTC*, p. 183.
57 *LTC*, p. 183. Candrakīrti puts this point succinctly in his *Madhyamakāvatāra* in the following manner:
If the aggregates are the self,
Since they are many, the self too becomes multiple. (*MA*, 6:127)
58 las byas pa chud za ba'i nyes pa/ *LTC*, p. 185. Tsongkhapa reads arguments 3, 4, and 5 as parts of Nāgārjuna's objection that if the self is identical with the aggregates, the self too will be subject to birth and death, just as are the aggregates. (*MMK*, 18:1) In doing so, Tsongkhapa is following Buddhapālita.
59 This is Nāgārjuna's opening argument in *MMK*, 18:1.
60 las ma byas pa dang phrad pa'i nyes pa/ *LTC*, p. 185.
61 skye ba dran pa mi 'thad pa/ *LTC*, p. 183.
62 *LTC*, pp. 183–5. Tsongkhapa lists this as the third argument, but the line of thought seems to flow better if we keep it as the fifth, as I have done here.
63 *LTC*, p. 184.
64 *MA*, 6:61. As the question of memory relates directly to Tsongkhapa's own theory of persons, I shall have more to say on this argument in the next chapter.
65 *MA*, 6:14.
66 The above reading of the argument is based on Tsongkhapa. He calls it the 'absurdity argument' (*ha cang thal ba*) in that an absurd consequence is being drawn from the thesis that cause and effects are intrinsically distinct. Tsongkhapa criticises some of the previous Tibetan commentators whom he sees as having misunderstood the argument. See *LTC*, p. 184; *RG*, p. 58; *GR*, p. 161.
67 bya ba dang byed pa po gcig tu 'gyur ba/ *LTC*, p. 189. Although Tsongkhapa does not give a separate heading for this argument, he includes this in the summary as one of the six arguments against the self/aggregates identity thesis. See *LTC*, p. 189.

68 Guy Bugault translates these two terms as 'possessor' and 'possessed,' respectively, and Frederick Streng, as 'he who acquires' and 'acquisitions.' However, the eminent Madhyamaka scholar Richard Robinson chooses 'appropriation' to convey this concept, as I have done here.
69 *LTC*, p. 183. Despite its critical importance, there seems to be no contemporary study of this peculiar Madhyamaka concept of agency.
70 *LN*, pp. 150–1.
71 I shall discuss the relationship of the designative basis and the designation in the next chapter.
72 *RG*, pp. 206–18.
73 *MMK*, chapters 18, 22, and 27; Candrakīrti, *MA*, 6:122–55. For Tsongkhapa's reading of these arguments, see *RG*, pp. 370–82; *GR*, pp. 363–406; *LTC*, pp. 182–93.
74 *MA*, 6:152–5.
75 This idea of designation and the designative base is a crucial aspect of Madhyamaka nominalism. I will deal with this issue in detail in the next chapter.
76 de la brten nas btags pa nyid kyis gdags gzhi ma yin par 'dod dgos te ... *LN*, p. 149.
77 William L. Ames seems to be correct in his contention that Tibetan translators and their Indian collaborators felt that *svabhāva* and *prakṛti* are synonymous and that the terms could be translated as *rang bzhin* or *ngo bo nyid* interchangeably. See Ames (1982), p. 162.
78 byas pa yin pa dang ghis yin pa gnyis gzhi gcig la 'dur mi rung ngo// *RG*, p. 271.
79 I am aware that in Western philosophical language, contingency is often contrasted with necessity rather than with intrinsicality. Admittedly, the term 'necessity' does not appear in its technical, ontological sense in Tsongkhapa's thought. However, the notion of intrinsic being (*rang bzhin*) seems to carry the same meaning.
80 *RG*, p. 271: 'jig rten na yang chu'i tsha ba dang ke ke ru la sogs pa nor sgyur mkhan gyis bcos ma'i pad ma ra' ga la sogs par bsgyur pa la de dag gi rang bzhin du mi brjod pa bzhin no//
81 chu'i tsha ba'am tshu rol dang pha rol lam ring po dang thung ngu ltar rgyu dang rkyen la ltos pa dang bcos par ma gyur pa gang yin pa de rang bzhin yin par brjod do// *Prasannapadā*, p. 227. Quoted by Tsongkhapa in *LTC*, p. 93.
82 Rationalist philosophers such as Spinoza may argue that causation need not entail contingency for it is possible to posit causation from a necessary substance. But Tsongkhapa would take issue with the tenability of the very existence of a necessary substance.
83 *RG*, p. 272: de'i phyir rang gi mtshan nyid kyis sam rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis yod pa dang thun mong ma yin pa'i rang gi mtshan nyid gnyis khyad par shin tu che'o//
84 *Pramāṇavārttika*, 'Pratyakṣa,' verses 1–3. For a contemporary discussion of this distinction based on the section on Sautrāntika ontology of Changkya Rolpai Dorje's *Grub mtha'*, see Anne Klein (1986) p. 47.
85 *LN*, p. 136: rtog ge'i gzhung nas don byed nus pa kho na la rang mtshan dang/ mngon pa'i mdo la sogs par gzhan dang thun mong ma yin par mtshon pa me'i tsha ba lta bu la rang gi msthan nyid du bshad pa dang/ rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa'i rang mtshan ni ches shin du mi 'dra'o//

86 Gorampa also draws a similar threefold distinction in his criticism of Tsongkhapa's claim that the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school accepts the notion of intrinsic being (*svabhāva*). See *lTa ba'i shen 'byed*, p. 137a.

87 rang bzhin dag ni bcos min dang//
gzhan la ltos pa med pa yin//
akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca/ *MMK*, 15:2b.
For an account of Candrakīrti's reading of this passage, see Ames (1983).

88 *RG*, p. 274.

89 *RG*, chapter 15, p. 274: 'di na rang gi ngo bo ni rang bzhin no zhes tha snyad byas pas gang zgig dngos po gang gi bdag gi ba yin pa de ni de'i rang bzhin no zhes brjod do// gang zhig gang gi bdag gi ba yin zhe na chos can gang gi chos gang ma bcos pa de ni de'i 'o// gang zhig bcos ma yin pa de ni de'i bdag gi ba ma yin te dper na chu'i tsha ba lta bu'o// gang zhig gzhan la rag ma las pa de yang de'i bdag gi ba ma yin te/ dper na rang gi 'khol po dang rang gi nor dag bzhin no// gang zhig gzhan la rag las pa de ni de'i bdag gi ba ma yin te/ dper na re zhig brnyen po rang dbang med pa lta bu'o//

90 de ni rang gi ngo bos yod pa'ang ma yin la med pa'ang ma yin no// Cited in *LTC*, p. 93.

91 Cited in *LTC*, p. 92; *RG*, p. 274.

92 Cited in *LTC*, p. 93.

93 de ni chos rnams kyi ngo dang ngo bo ni rang bzhin dang rang bzhin ni stong nyid dang stong nyid ni rang bzhin med pa dang de ni de bzhin nyid dang de yang de bzhin nyid kyi ngo bor 'gyur ba med pa dang rtag tu gnas pa'o// *RG*, p. 275. This appears to be a paraphrase from Candrakīrti's *PSP*, pp. 227–8.

94 *RG*, p. 21.

95 Richard Robinson asserts that emptiness should not be considered to be an objective feature of existence. He suggests that emptiness is rather a part of a descriptive symbol; in other words, it is an aspect of what in technical-philosophical lexicon is known as 'meta-language.' See Robinson (1967), p. 43. For Tsongkhapa, however, emptiness is an objective feature of existence, albeit in a purely negative sense.

96 See chapter 2, p. 46.

97 William L. Ames concludes his exposition of Candrakīrti's understanding of the notion of *svabhāva* by delineating five levels in Candrakīrti's consideration of *svabhāva*. According to Ames: (1) Candrakīrti does not question, on the conventional level, the belief that reality is composed of entities possessing *svabhāva*. On this level, it is correct to say that heat is the *svabhāva* of fire, since heat is invariably a property of fire. (2) Candrakīrti denies that the conventional *svabhāva* is truly *svabhāva*. (3) That things are devoid of *svabhāva* is invariably true and not contingent on any particular circumstances. Therefore, this fact itself could be said to be their *svabhāva*. (4) The *svabhāva* of level three is purely negative; it is the negation of level one *svabhāva*. (5) Finally, ultimate truth, truth as it is for those who are free from misknowledge, cannot be expressed by asserting either the existence or the non-existence of *svabhāva*. (Ames, 1982, pp. 174–5.)

From Tsongkhapa's point of view, *svabhāva* as the intrinsic nature of all things and events – the absence of intrinsic reality – exists, for it is the sole ultimate reality. As I shall attempt to argue in chapter 5, for Tsongkhapa, to exist is to exist on the conventional level. On the ultimate level, however, no

entity's existence remains tenable. Therefore, if *svabhāva* is understood in terms of intrinsic reality, to maintain its existence even on the conventional level is problematic. Therefore, from Tsongkhapa's point of view, these five levels of consideration do not contribute any more clarity to Tsongkhapa's own differentiation between the two senses of *svabhāva*.

98 See chapter 2.

99 Tsongkhapa discusses his objections under the heading, 'dgag bya ngos 'dzin khyab chung ba dgag pa ...' *LTC*, pp. 89–97.

100 gzhan yang don dam par dang yang dag par grub na ... de dag ni don dam par grub pa sogs kyi don min te/ ... *LTC*, p. 90.

101 'dus byas rnams rgyu rkyen gyis bskyed pa dang gzhan du 'gyur ba ni rang gi sde pa rnams la grub zin pas ... Ibid., p. 90.

102 bum pa la mi rtag pas khyab kyang mi rtag pa bum pa'i don du mi rung gi ... Ibid., p. 90.

103 de ni grub mtha' smra ba rnams kyis thun mong ma yin pa'i 'dzin pas btags pa tsam yin pa lus can 'khor bar 'chin ba'i rtsa ba min pa'i phyir dang/ ... *LTC*, p. 190.

104 *LTC*, p. 94: de lta na mig la sogs pa'i 'dus byas 'di dag ni rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin du'ang ma grub la/ chos nyid la rang bzhin du bzhag pa der yang ma grub pas rang bzhin gang du'ang ma grub pa dang don dam bden pa ni chos nyid la rang bzhin du bzhag pa der grub kyang rang bzhin der 'jog byed bcos ma min pa dang/ gzhan la mi ltos pa ni rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin der cung zad kyang med pas tha snyad du grub pa tsam mo//

105 I would like to thank Tom J. F. Tillemans for drawing my attention to this difference between Candrakīrti's and Tsongkhapa's readings of the definition of *svabhāva* in *MMK*, 15.

106 *LTC*, p. 197; *GR*, p. 139.

107 Bugault (1983), pp. 55–6.

108 The question of identity in the context of dependent origination will be discussed in the next chapter.

109 Quoted in *LTC*, p. 206; *RG*, p. 133; *LTCh*, p. 686; *Notes on the 'Wisdom' Chapter*, folio 19b.

110 *LTCh*, p. 685.

Chapter 4

1 Perry's own formulation is as follows: (i) What relation obtains between simultaneous K-events that are events belonging to the same K? and (ii) What relation obtains between K-stages that are stages of the same K? See Perry (1975), p. 9.

2 *GR*, p. 368: kun gzhi 'dod pas kun gzhi rnam shes nyid gang zag gi mtshan gzhir smra'o//

3 Van der Kuijp has drawn our attention to questions raised by the well-known Tibetan translator Pangtön Lodrö Tenpa concerning the validity of the concept of this triad. According to Gorampa, whose commentary on Sakya Pandita's *Treasury of Reasoning* is the source for this, Pangtön argues that this is entirely a fabrication of the Tibetans with no basis in any great Sanskrit treatises.

He contends that the concept is based on confusions caused by the Tibetan translators using two different terms '*mtshon bya*' (definiendum) and '*mtshan gzhi*' (illustration) for the single Sanskrit term *lakṣaṇa*. See Van der Kuijp, Leonard (1983). For Pangtön's objections and Gorampa's rebbutal, see *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter gyi don gsal bar byed pa*, folio 43.

4 See also *LN*, p. 152; *RG*, p. 213.

5 bdag brten nas btags pa tsam du bshad pa. *GR*, pp. 359–406.

6 Insofar as Tsongkhapa suggests that we can arrive at a correct understanding of our own identities only when we have cleansed our thoughts of all notions of intrinsic being, there is an element of revisionism even in Tsongkhapa's concept of persons. Thus, Tsongkhapa's position can be characterized only as a qualified non-revisionism.

7 pha rol pos btags yod kyi dngos po rnams rang skya thub pa'i rdzas yod re gdags gzhir yod pa la brten nas 'dogs par khas len zhing .../ *GR*, p. 396.

8 *LN*, pp. 135–6: 'o na ji 'dra zhig tu bzung na rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub par bzung ba yin zhe na/ 'di la thog mar grub mtha' smra ba'i lugs brjod par bya ste/ gang zag 'dis las 'di byas so/ 'bras bu 'di myong ngo zhes pa'i tha snyad btags pa la rang gi phung po 'di nyid gang zag yin nam 'on te de dag las don gzhan zhes gang zag gi tha snyad btags pa de'i don btsal te/ don gcig pa'am don tha dad pa'i phyogs gang rung zhig rnyed nas gang zag de 'jog sa byung na las gsog pa po la sogs par 'jog nus la/ ma rnyed na 'jog mi nus pas gang zag gi tha snyad btags pa tsam gyis mi tshim par de'i tha snyad gang la btags pa'i gdags gzhi de ji ltar yin dpyad cing btsal nas 'jog na gang zag rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub par 'jog pa yin te/ rang sde bye brag tu smra ba nas dbu ma rang rgyud pa'i bar thams cad kyis de bzhin du 'dod do//

9 See chapter 3, p. 86.

10 *RG*, p. 319.

11 *LN*, p. 152.

12 T. R. V. Murti describes the standpoint of the Buddhist schools as modalist in contrast to what he calls the substantialist views of the non-Buddhist schools. He argues that the Prāsaṅgikas' view of personal identity transcends both substantialism and modalism. See Murti (1955), p. 11. From Tsongkhapa's point of view, it is not the modalist aspect of the Buddhist view that is problematic; rather, it is the realist assumption that underlies their modalism that must be rejected.

13 Duerlinger (1993), p. 95.

14 Vasubandhu, p. 304; Duerlinger (1989), pp. 173–5.

15 Vasubandhu, pp. 289–91; Duerlinger (1989), pp. 154–7.

16 *GR*, p. 373. This is Candrakīrti's argument in *MA*, 6:130a.

17 *GR*, p. 374.

18 *GR*, p. 373: pha rol pos phung po dang sems bdag tu 'dod pa ni bdag dang gang zag rnams tha snyad kyi dbang gis bzhag pa tsam du ma rtogs par btags don btsal nas bzhag pa yin la/ de ltar na phung po dang sems bdag yin pa de rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis grub pa'i bdag tu 'gyur la/ bdag med par mngon sum du mthong ba'i tshe bdag de rnam pa thams cad du med par rtogs dgos pas/ pha rol po la phung po dang sems kyi dngos po bdag yin pa de thams cad med par mthong dgos pa'i skyon 'jug la/ ming du btags pa tsam gyis 'jog gi/ btags don btsal nas 'jog par mi 'dod pa'i lugs la skyon de rnam pa thams cad du med pa'i phyir ro//

19 Relate this to Tsongkhapa's delineation of the scope of reason and his distinction between the domains of conventional and ultimate analyses as defined in chapter 2.

20 dge slong dag dge sbyong ngam bram ze gang su dag cig bdag go snyam du yang dag par rjes su lta ba de dag ni/ nye bar len pa'i phung po lnga po 'di dag kho na la yang dar par rjes su lta'o// Quoted by Tsongkhapa in *GR*, p. 376.

21 *MABh*, p. 196.

22 *GR*, p. 377: de' phyir phung po la lta'o zhes pas ni phung po la brten nas btags pa'i bdag dmigs par ston par gsal te/ phung po las ngo bo tha dad pa dang phung po nyid bdag tu 'dzin pa'i dmigs pa yin pa khegs pa'i phyir ro//

23 'It's the [people of the] world that argues with me, not I [with them]. I have no dispute with [the conventions of] the world for I accept whatever [the conventions of] the world deem real. And I do not accept whatever [the conventions of] the world deem as unreal.' Quoted in full by Tsongkhapa in *GR*, p. 308. Candrakīrti cites the first part of the sūtra in his *MABh*, p. 220. Tsongkhapa identifies the scripture as *sDom pa gsum bstan pa'i mdo* (*Triambaranirdeśasūtra*) which is cited as part of the sutra called *Ratnakūṭasūtra* (P760).

24 This tendency can be detected in the various linguistic interpretations of Madhyamaka philosophy, especially those that follow a Wittgensteinian reading. See, especially, Huntington (1989).

25 *GR*, p. 33: de yang sangs rgyas kyi sa ma thob tshun chad du ma rig pa'i bag chags kyis ma slad pa'i shes pa ni/ 'phags pa rnams kyi mnyam gzhag mi rtog pa'i ye shes min pa med la/ de yang res 'jog pa ste mnyam gzhag las langs pa na bag chags kyis bslad pa can du ske'o// See also *LTC*, p. 68.

26 See chapter 3.

27 *GR*, p. 141: bdag 'dzin gyi 'jig lta lhan skyes la ni rtsa bar phung po dmigs pa yin pa bkag cing/ 'grel par brten nas btags pa'i bdag dmigs par gsungs pas/ nga'o snyam pa tsam zhig skye ba'i dmigs pa'i nga tsam dang/ gang zag tsam zhig la dmigs par bya'o// It is interesting to note that in *LTC* (pp. 109–10) Tsongkhapa makes exactly the same observation but with a notable difference. There, he fails to mention the mere I (*nga tsam*) as the object of our innate grasping at self. Similarly, there is not a single reference to this mere I in *LN*, although there is a discussion about the object of our innate I-consciousness. (See *LN*, pp. 149–50.) This leads me to surmise that much of Tsongkhapa's constructive theory of persons evolved subsequent to the writing of *LTC* and *LN*.

28 rang lugs ni ngar 'dzin lhan skyes kyis gang la dmigs pa'i gzhi dmigs pa ni nga dang bdag dang gang zag tu bzhag dgos la ... *RG*, p. 213.

29 gang dzag phung po la brten nas btags pa tsam/ *LN*, p. 149; *RG*, pp. 206–18.

30 *LN*, p. 149; *RG*, pp. 216–8. Cabezón (1994), chapter 8, discusses Madhyamaka ontological nominalism based on Khedrup's *Stong thun skal bzang mig 'byed*. For Tsongkhapa's ontological nominalism, see chapter 5.

31 See chapter 3, p. 91.

32 *RG*, p. 210: 'o na gang zag gis lta ba la sogs pa len pa'i don ci yin zhe na/ gang zag de gzugs la lta ba por song ba'i byed par mig gi dbang po song ba na des de blangs pa yin la/ de'i tshe lta ba'i dbang po dang dus mnyam du yod la nyan pa'i dbang po la sogs pa'i snga rol na yod par 'dod de des gzhan yang shes par bya'o//

33 Collins (1982), p. 202.

34 *RG*, pp. 430–1; *LN*, p. 218.
35 *RV*, 1:46. See Hopkins (1975), p. 24.
36 *MMK*, 10.
37 *MMK*, 10:15.
38 *GR*, p. 383.
39 In doing so, Tsongkhapa is following Candrakīrti (*PSP*, pp. 159–60) and is elaborating on the sense of *MMK*, 8:13.
40 *GR*, p. 382; *RG*, p. 227. Tsongkhapa cites from *PSP*, pp. 159–60 to underline this point. See also Murti (1955), pp. 136–8.
41 *RG*, pp. 203–4: de bkag pa na de rnams phan tshun bltos nas bzhag pa rten 'byung gi yod par 'grub cing tshad ma dang gzhal bya yang de dang 'dra bas/ phan tshun ltos grub kyi tshad ma dang gzhal bya khas mi len pa min te de ni bsgrub bya sgrub byed la yang khyad par med do/ rgyu 'bras la sogs pa de dag kyang tha snyad phan tshun ltos pa tsam tu ma zad don gnyis kyang phan tshun ltos pa gzhung gi don yin te/ phan tshun ltso pa'i rgyu mtshan gyis bya byed kyi don dang tha snyad thams cad la rang bzhin gyis yod pa 'gog pa'i skabs yin pas so//
42 Ruegg (1981), p. 43.
43 Ruegg (1981), p. 43. Following is the verse from *MMK* being referred to by Ruegg:

Pratītya yad yad bhavati na hi tāvat tad eva tat/
na cānyad api tat tasmān nochinnaṃ nāpi śāśvatam// *MMK*, 18:10.

44 Something like this appears to be Alasdair Macintyre's position too when he writes, 'Thus personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires. Without such unity there would not be subjects of whom stories could be told.' Macintyre (1981), p. 218.
45 *RG*, p. 215: lhas byin gyis dus snga phyi'i bdag so sor ma phye bar nga'o snyam du 'dzin pa'i dmigs pa'i gzhir gyur pa'i bdag ni thog mas med pa nas zhugs pa'i nga tsam yin pas/ lha la sogs pa'i lus blangs dus kyi 'gro ba so so ba'i bdag rnams ni snga ma'i bye brag re'o/ lhas byin gyis skye ba so sor phye ba'i bdag la nga'o snyam du bzung ba'i bdag ni tshe re re'i bdag phyods re ba yin no//
46 *RG*, pp. 237–8: de bzhin du ma 'ongs pa'i skye ba la yang tshe 'di'i dus kyi gang zag de nyid skye ba phyi mar mi 'gro yang nga'o snyam pa'i dmigs pa nga tsam zhig der yang rjes su 'gro bas/ rang nyid skye ba phyi mar sdug bsngal gyis dogs nas de'i rgyu mi dge ba 'dir spong ba dang bde bar bya ba'i phyir du 'dir dge ba la brtson pa yang 'thad de/ dper na de ring gi dus kyi mi 'di sang gi dus na med kyang sang bkres skom gyi sdug bsngal byung gi dogs nas de ring nas bza' btung gsog pa dang/ rgas pa'i tshe sdug bsngal gyis dogs nas gzhon dus nor gsog pa bzhin no/ 'di thams cad kyang yul dus 'di'i bdag ces so sor mi 'byed par spyir bdag bde ba thob pa dang sdug bsngal dang bral bar 'dod nas byed la/ bdag tsam yang dus de dag tu rjes su 'gro bas des yul la 'khrul pa yang min no//
47 Quoted by Tsongkhapa in *LTC*, p. 184 and *RG*, p. 465. Cabezón identifies this as a citation from the *Lankāvatārasūtra* (P775). See Cabezón (1992), p. 479, n. 665. See also Wayman, pp. 341, 474.
48 *RG*, p. 237: gal te tshe 'di'i lhas byin gyis tshe rabs snga ma rnams su 'di dang 'dir skyes so zhes dran pa yod du chug kyang des dran pa ltar khas blang du mi rung ste/ len na ni tshe 'di yi lhas byin 'di nyid tshe rabs snga ma rnams su yang yod pas rtag par 'gyur ro snyam na/ 'di ni dran tshul ma shes pa'i rtsod pa yin te/ dper na rtsod pa'i dus sgra 'dra ba zhig sngar rtag par khas blangs la phyis sngar

gyi khas blangs ma dran par mi rtag par khas blangs pa na/ rtsod zlas 'gal ba bsgrigs pa'i tshe dran par 'gyur la de'i tshe ngas sngar rtag par khas blangs 'dug snyam du dran gyi phyi ma'i dus na yod pa'i nga 'dis sngar rtag pa khas blangs so snyam du mi dran no/ de'i rgyu mtshan gyis 'gal ba sgrig nus kyi de lta ma yin na 'gal ba sgrig mi nus te sngar dus kyi rtag pa khas len mkhan gyis phyi dus su mi rtag par khas ma blangs pa'i phyir ro// See also *GR*, p. 291.

49 For Vasubandhu's response, see *AKBh*, pp. 297–9; also Duerlinger (1989), pp. 164–6.

50 Matilal (1986), p. 149.

51 For a detailed account of this theory of memory, see Matilal (1986), pp. 148–53.

52 A detailed critique of this concept by Tsongkhapa can be found in *LN*, pp. 165–9; *GR*, pp. 287–9. Khedrup also gives a lengthy treatment of the issue in *TTC*, for which, see Cabezón (1992), pp. 345–55.

53 For example, Tsongkhapa calls the section on his refutation of the concept of self-cognition (*svasaṃvedanā*) in *GR* 'Refutation of the "proof" validating the intrinsic existence of dependent phenomena' (gzhan dbang rang bzhin gyis grub pa'i sgrub byed tshad ma dgag pa). See *GR*, p. 248. The later Nyingma thinker Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso (1846–1912) has argued that the Prāsaṅgikas do not reject the conventional existence of this self-cognizing faculty of consciousness. (See especially his *sPyod 'jug sher 'grel ketaka*, pp. 30–2.) For a contemporary study of Mipham's views on this self-cognizing faculty, see Williams (1998).

54 Ji ltar ral gris rang gi so//
gcod par mi byed sor mos ni//
rang la reg par mi byed ltar//
rang gi sems kyang de bzhin no// Quoted by Tsongkhapa in *GR*, p. 301.

55 shes pa'i bdag nyid la ni rdul phra rab dag dang gnyis po med pa'i dngos po'i ngo bo mi snang ngo// mi snang ba la ni tha snyad med do// ... Quoted in *GR*, p. 301.

56 yul myong ba las yul can dran pa ske ba na/ shes pa spangs nas dran pa min gyi/ sngar gzugs 'di mthong ngo zhes yul yul can gnyis 'brel ba las te 'brel bar dren pa'i phyir ro// *GR*, p. 292.

57 Ibid., p. 291.

58 *BCA*, 9:23.

59 Tsongkhapa credits Candrakīrti with the following account of memory. See *MA*, 6:75 and its *Bhāṣya*.

60 Although Tsongkhapa does not explicitly cite this, I am attributing this to him because he argues that those who uphold the notion of intrinsic existence will be compelled, by their own logic, to accept that the person who is experiencing the memory and the one who had the prior perception do not share the same mental continuum. Hence, in their view, the very experience of memory becomes untenable. See *GR*, pp. 288–9.

61 sngar gyi myong bas bcad pa de nyid dran pas kyang gcod pas yul gcig pa'i dbang gis ... *GR*, p. 291.

62 *GR*, p. 291: byams pa 'di zhes zer yang de skad smra dus kyi dus dang/ de'i dus su gang na gnas pa'i yul gyi khyad par du byas pa'i byams pa sngar mthong snyam du mi 'dzin par/ byams pa tsam la 'dzin pa ni rang gi blo la bltas pas shes so//

63 For example the philosopher John Locke writes the following in his *Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, book 2, chapter 27:20, p. 336: 'For as far

as any intelligent Being can repeat the *idea* of any past Action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of present Action; so far it is the same *personal self.*'

64 *RG*, p. 237.

65 *RG*, p. 215.

66 lhas byin gyis dus snga phyi'i bdag so sor ma phye bar nga'o snyam du 'dzin pa'i dmigs pa'i gzhir gyur pa'i bdag ni thog ma med pa nas zhugs pa'i nga tsam yin pas/ . . . *RG*, p. 215.

67 *RG*, p. 238: des na nga'o snyam du tha snyad 'dogs mkhan gyi mi dang tha snyad btags pa'i gzhi bdag gnyis kyab snyam du mi gzung bar mi de bdag de'i cha gcig yin pa shes par byos shig//

68 *RG*, p. 215: yul gyi bdag bzhin du yul can gyi ngar 'dzin yang so sor phye ba dang ma phye ba'i 'dzin stangs can du shes par bya'o//

69 I would like to thank Paul Williams for drawing my attention to this problem of solipsism in Tsongkhapa's theory of persons.

70 See note 61 above.

71 Duerlinger (1993), p. 80.

72 *LTC*, pp. 153–4: de yang zhib tu bshad na myu gu yod par 'dzin pa lta bu la 'dzin tshul gsum ste/ myu gu la rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin yod par 'dzin pa bden par yod par 'dzin pa dang/ myu gu rang gi ngo bos grub pa med kyang sgyu ma ltar du yod par 'dzin pa dang/ bden brdzun gang gis kyang khyad par du ma byas par spyir yod pa tsam zhig tu 'dzin pa'o// See also *GR*, pp. 25, 144. Nagao characterizes these perspectives as the three realms of understanding. He lists them as, (1) true being, (2) false being, and (3) being only. He asserts that according to Tsongkhapa all awareness of being occurs in one of these three modes. See Nagao (1989), p. 113.

73 *LTC*, p. 154.

74 *GR*, p. 289.

75 *AKBh*, p. 298; and *MA*, 6:61.

76 *GR*, p. 267: chu klung gi rgyun ltar rgyun chags par rgyu dang 'bras bu 'brel bar 'jug pa na/ skye 'chi brgyud pas bar stong med pa rnam par ma chad par gnas pa/ 'du byed kyi skad cig dus gsum pa'i nye bar len pa can la bya ste/ skad cig ma rnams gang gi cha shas yin pa'i cha can yin gyi snga phyi bar ma chad pa tsam min no//

77 Tsongkhapa and subsequent Geluk writers treat this quotation as a well-known passage from a sūtra, yet, to my knowledge, no one has idenfied its source. Furthermore, there are slight variations on the passage when quoted, even in citations by Tsongkhapa himself. For example, in *GR* (p. 285), he quotes the following: sems can rnams rnam par shes pa ni rgyud gcig pa ste re re ba'o//, while in his *KK* (p. 69), he gives the following quotation: rnam par shes pa gnyis cig car byung ba ni gnas ma yin zhing skabs med do//.

78 *GR*, p. 285.

79 To this day, this issue of a singularity of continuum is one of the most hotly debated epistemological questions amongst scholars in the Geluk monastic colleges in the exile Tibetan community in India. This is because the ramifications of this debate are enormous for an understanding of the nature of consciousness.

80 For example, Dharmakīrti felt the need to write a separate work specifically arguing how the distinctness of each individual's mental continuum is not

obliterated by his idealist ontology according to which all external objects of perception are held as mental projections. See Dharmakīrti, *Saṃtānāntarasiddhi* (P5716).

81 Admittedly, Tsongkhapa does not explicitly relate the Buddhist theory of *karma* to his discourse on personal identity as described above. Nevertheless, something like what I have suggested here appears to be an underlying assumption in his thought. For example, in *RG* Tsongkhapa explicitly relates his distinction of general and particular identities to the concept of ethical responsibility. He writes: 'di rnams rten 'brel spyi dang khyad par du las dkar nag gi 'bras bus bde sdug 'byung ba'i nges pa la khyad che bar snang bas phyogs tsam brjod pa'o// *RG*, p. 238.

82 The notion of basic mind appears to be very similar (if not exactly the same) to what Steven Collins calls the '*bhavanga* mind' in Theravāda Buddhism. See Collins (1982), p. 226.

83 *GR*, pp. 233–4: de yang bag chags 'jog pa'i gzhi med par mi rung bas gzhi de gang yin zhe na/ ji ltar kun gzhi rnam shes khas len pa rnams kyi ltar na/ nyon yid kyis nga'o snyam du dmigs pa'i gzhir gyur pa'i kun gzhi rnam shes bag chags kyi gnas su 'dod pa de bzhin du lugs 'dis kyang nga'o snyam pa tsam gyi blo lhan skyes kyi dmigs pa de nyid bag chags sgo ba'i gzhir bzhed do//

84 nga'o snyam pa'i blo lhan skyes kyi dmigs pa de nyid bag chags sgo ba'i gzhir bzhed do// *GR*, p. 243.

85 *GR*, p. 235.

86 *KK*, pp. 58–64. Gareth Sparham (1993), pp. 113–8.

87 A key Indian Mahāyāna text on this doctrine of buddha-nature is Maitreya's *Ratnagotravibhāgamahāyānottaratantra* (P5525).

88 snying po sngar ltar gsungs pa sgra ji bzhin par 'dzin na bdag yod par smra ba dang mtshungs par gsal bar bstan te ... *LN*, p. 192. Tsongkhapa substantiates his point by referring to the following passage from the *Lankāvatārasūtra* (P775):

> Just as a mirage is not water, yet it deceives animals who thirst for water, so what is taught [on the superficial, literary level] will appeal only to the childish but is certainly not a discourse that will delight the nonconceptual cognition of the *āryas*. Therefore, you should follow the meaning and not be attached to language.

dper na dmigs sgyu ni chur med pas chur zhen pa'i ri dags slu ba bzhin du bstan pa'i chos kyang byis pa mgu bar byed kyi 'phags pa'i ye shes rnam par dgod pa'i gtam ni min no// des na kyod kyis don gyi rjes su 'brang bar bya yi brjod pa la chags par mi bya'o// Quoted in *LN*, p. 190 and *GR*, p. 325.

89 In *GR*, Tsongkhapa cites the following two verses from *Dharmadhātustava* to underline this point.

ji ltar me yis dag pa'i gos//
sna tshogs dri mas dri ma can//
ji ltar me yi nang bcug na//
dri ma 'tshig 'gyur gos min ltar//

de bzhin 'od gsal ba yi sems//
'dod chags las skyes dri ma can//
ye shes me yis dri ma sreg//
de nyis 'od gsal ma yin no// Quoted in *GR*, p. 34.

90 de la dbu ma pa ni sems kyi rang bzhin gshis la cir yang ma grub pa'i stong nyid de rtogs pa na ... *LS*, p. 333.
91 The present Dalai Lama attributes this view to the Indian Vajrayāna master Buddhaśrijñāna. See the Dalai Lama (1995), pp. 95–6.
92 See chapter 2, p. 67.
93 Quoted in full by Tsongkhapa in *LTC*, pp. 201–2.
94 For a discussion on the various uses of chariot imagery in Buddhist teachings that are based on Theravāda texts, see Steven Collins (1982), pp. 230–3.
95 Just as we call something a chariot
in dependence on the collection of its parts,
likewise, we conventionally say 'sentient being'
in dependence upon the aggregates.

ji ltar yan lag tshogs rnams la/
brten nas shing rta brjod pa ltar/
de bzhin phung po rnams brten nas/
kun rdzob sems can zhes bya'o//

Quoted by Tsongkhapa in *LTC*, p. 171; *LN*, p. 149; *GR*, p. 379. In *LTC*, Tsongkhapa quotes the verse as the 'sūtra cited in *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*,' while in *LN*, its source is identified simply as *Śrāvaka's Tripiṭaka.*
96 As the negative function of the chariot analogy has been explored elsewhere, e.g., in Hopkins (1983), I shall restrict my discussion here to a bare minimum.
97 An analysis of these possible relationships between the self and aggregates and a critique of each have been provided in chapter 3.
98 *LTC*, p. 176; *GR*, p. 397.
99 *LTC*, p. 177.
100 Ibid. Tsongkhapa credits Candrakīrti with this point.
101 *LN*, p. 211; *LTC*, p. 181.
102 *LTC*, p. 177.
103 de ltar na shing rta khas len pa ni rang bzhin yod med dpyod pa'i rigs pas grub ba min gyi/ rigs pas rnam par dpyad pa de dor nas 'jig rten la ste tha snyad pa'i shes pa rang dga' ba gnod med tsam gyis grub bo// Ibid.
104 de'i 'jog tshul ni rang gi yan lag la brten nas btags pai btags yod du 'grub pa yin no// *LTC*, p. 178.
105 *GR*, p. 398.
106 *GR*, p. 399. Tsongkhapa credits Candrakīrti with this argument. See *MA*, 6:159.
107 *GR*, p. 399.
108 *LTC*, p. 181.
109 Ibid.
110 *LTC*, p. 181. Ruegg, in summarising his discussion on Candrakīrti's sevenfold analysis, makes the following observation: 'The sevenfold scheme of analysis thus reveals the principle of *pratītya-samutpāda* while still saving the appearances of things recognised consensually in the world (*lokaprasidha*) of *saṃvṛti*, but which cannot sustain careful analysis; and it thus permits the Yogin to fathom reality (*tattvam avāga*).' See Ruegg (1981), p. 74.
111 *LTC*, p. 181: bdun po de dag re re la gnod pa 'bab par mthong ba na/ khyab byed khegs pas khyab bya yang khegs pa thog mar byas nas rang nzhin med pa la thag chod kyi nges pa mang du drang/ de'i rjes su de ltar rang bzhin med

kyang shing rta'i tha snyad bsnyon mi nus par mthong ba na/ ... rang rang gi ngo bos grub pa'i rang bzhin yang cung zad kyang med pa'i phyir snyam du rten cing 'brel par byung ba'i don rang bzhin gyis ma skyes pa la nges pa rnyed par 'gyur ba'i phyir ro//

112 *LTC*, pp. 180–1.

Chapter 5

1 For a detailed discussion on the Buddhist concept of *prajñaptisat*, see Williams (1980).

2 de'i phyir yod pa 'jog pa thams cad 'jig rten gyi tha snyad kyi dbang gis 'jog ste ... *LTCh*, p. 721.

3 A detailed study of the Geluk views on the theory of two truths can be found in Newland (1995).

4 Tsongkhapa uses the terms 'dependently originated things' (*chos can rten 'brel*) and 'their mode of being, the ultimate truth about things' (*cho nyid don dam pa'i bden pa*) to characterize the distinction between the apparent and the real. See *LN*, p. 98.

5 On the views of earlier Tibetan thinkers, which are often the objects of Tsongkhapa's critique, see Thurman (1984), introduction, pp. 49–63.

6 Chapter 2.

7 See, for example, Karmapa Mikyö Dorje's criticism of Tsongkhapa's theory of emptiness in Williams (1983).

8 *GR*, pp. 173–5; *LTCh*, p. 715. Michael M. Broido has argued that Tsongkhapa's concept of the two truths is more complex than Candrakīrti's and that it reflects the influence of Vajrayāna. See Broido (1988), p. 29.

9 Ngagwang Palden gives a lengthy treatment of these potential fallacies in his *dPyid kyi dpal mo'i glu dbyangs*, pp. 49–51.

10 *MA*, 6:23; *GR*, pp. 173–5.

11 *LTCh*, p. 715: phyi nang gi dngos po 'di rnams re re la yang don dam pa dang kun rdzob pa'i ngo bo gnyis gnyis yod de/...

12 Ibid.

13 *GR*, p. 197.

14 The coming into being of things is *saṃvṛti*,
and in terms of ultimate truth, it lacks intrinsic being.
That which deludes this absence of intrinsic being
is said to be the 'perfect reality [obscuring] *saṃvṛti*.'

dngos rnams skye ba kun rdzob tu//
dams pa'i don du rang bzhin med//
rang bzhin med la 'khrul pa gang//
de ni yang dag kun rdzob 'dod// Quoted in *GR*, p. 186.

15 *GR*, p. 186: rkang pa dang pos bstan pa'i kun rdzob dang/ rkang pa phyi ma gnyis kyis bstan pa'i kun rdzob gnyis gcig tu mi bya ste/ dang po ni/ rang gis dngos po rnams skye ba sogs su gang du khas len pa'i kun rdzob yin la/ phyi ma ni dngos po rnams gang gi ngor bden pa'i bden 'dzin gyi kun rdzob yin pa'i phyir ro//

16 *RG*, p. 405; *LTCh*, p. 714.

17 *GR*, p. 185; *RG*, p. 403; *LTCh*, p. 713.

18 Ibid.

19 kun rdzob pa'i blo ngor bden pa/ 'jig rten shes ngo la btos nas bden pa/ See *GR*, p. 181; *LTCh*, p. 718. In making this distinction, Tsongkhapa is following Candrakīrti.

20 *LTCh*, p. 718: thal 'gyur ba'i lugs kyis ni/ 'phral gyi 'khrul rgyus ma bslad pa'i shes pa drug dang/ de las bzlog pa'i shes pa drug dang/ shes pa snga ma drug gis bzung ba'i yul drug dang/ phyi ma drug gis bzung pa'i yul drug ste/ log pa'i yul yul can drug log pa'i kun rdzob dang/ ma log pa'i yul yul can drug yang dag kun rdzob tu 'jog la/

21 dbu ma pa rang gi lugs la ... yang dag dang log pa'i kun rdzob gnyis su mi byed de ... *LTCh*, p. 718.

22 *RG*, p. 409: de lta bu'i gnod pa med pa'i shes pa drug gis bzung ba'i kun rdzob pa'i don dang/ de las bzlog pa'i don la yang dag dang log par 'jog pa ni 'jig rten pa'i shes pa kho na la ltos nas yin gyi/ de dag ji ltar snang ba ltar gyi don du yod pa la 'jig rten pa'i shes pas gnod pa med pa dang yod pa'i pyir ro/ 'phags pa la ltos nas ni yang dag dang log pa gnyis su med de/ ji ltar gzugs brnyan la sogs pa snang ba ltar gyi don du med pa bzhin du/ ma rig pa dang ldan pa rnams la sngon po la sogs pa rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub par snang ba yang snang ba ltar gyi don du med pa'i phyir ro/ de'i phyir shes pa de gnyis la 'khrul ma 'khrul yang dbyer med do//

23 *LN*, p. 141: ming tsam gyi don ni lngar ltar tha snyad kyi don btsal ba na mi rnyed pa la byed kyi/ ming yod cing don med pa'am ming ma yin pa'i don med pa ni ma yin no// See also *RG*, p. 31.

24 The term 'empirical' must be understood here in a broad sense, embracing even the heightened meditative states of a yogi.

25 See chapter 4, especially note 23.

26 'jig rten pa'i tha snyad la grags pa/ *LTC*, p. 72.

27 shes pa der grags pa ni snang ba'am myong ba'i tha snyad 'dogs pa'i gzhir gyur pa rnams so// *LTC*, p. 73.

28 *LTC*, pp. 73–4: dper na thag pa la sbrul lo snyam pa dang smig rgyu la chu'o snyam 'dzin pa na yin lugs la ji ltar yin dpyod pa med pa'i blos bzung ba yin mod kyang/ des bzung ba'i don la tha snyad pa'i tshad mas gnod pas de dag tha snyad du'ang med pa yin no//

29 Ibid., p. 73.

30 Ibid., p. 72.

31 *LTC*, pp. 72–3: de la tha snyad du yo par 'dod pa dang med par 'dod pa ni ci 'dra ba zhig gi sgo nas 'jog pa yin snyam na/ tha snyad pa'i shes pa la grags pa yin pa dang ji ltar grags pa'i don de la tha snyad pa'i tshad ma gzhan gyis gnod pa med pa dang/ de kho na nyid la'am rang bzhin yod med tshul bzhin du dpyod pa'i rigs pas gnod pa mi 'bab pa zhig ni tha snyad du yod par 'dod la/ de dag las ldog pa ni med par 'dod do//

32 See chapter 2.

33 *Grub mtha' kun shes*, pp. 208, 215. Tauscher (1992) correctly points out that although Taktsang never mentions Tsongkhapa by his name it is evident that the object of his so-called 'eighteen heavy load of contradictions' is clearly meant to be Tsongkhapa as recognised by subsequent Geluk writers. A translation of a section of Taktsang's critique of Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka views can be found in Tauscher (1992). Panchen Lobsang Chögyen in his *brTsod lan* (pp. 406–22) does not cite the full expression but only the second

part *tshad grub*. Interestingly, Tsongkhapa himself never uses the short expression *tha snyad tshad grub* although it is amply evident from his writings that he does accept 'validly cognised conventional reality' (*tha snyad tshad mas grub pa*). For a brief contemporary study of Panchen's repudiation of Taktshang's critique, see Cabezón, 1995.

34 *Ornament of Nāgārjuna's Thought*, pp. 293–8. A line-by-line repudiation of Gendün Chöphel's arguments against the idea of 'conventions established by valid cognition' (*tha snyad sthad grub*) can be found in Zeme Lobsang Palden's *Rebuttal*, pp. 16–102.

35 de'i phyir stag tshang bas don dam dang tshad grub dang tshugs thub don gcig tu 'dod pa ni nam mkha' za bar 'dod pa dang 'dra ste/ ... *Annotations*, IV, ff. 129a.

36 rang bzhin med pa'i rten 'brel gzugs brnyan lta bu nges par gnas lugs la yang 'dod dgos/ de khas blangs kyang re zhig la skyon du mi 'gyur/ *A Letter to Rendawa*, p. 63, quoted in Williams (1983), p. 130.

37 Williams (1983), p. 130.

38 *LTC*, pp. 72–3: de la tha snyad pa'i shes pa ni chos gang la'ang ji ltar snang ba ltar gyi rjes su 'jug pa yin gyi/ snang ba'i don de blo la de ltar snang tsam yin nam/ 'on te don gyi yin tshul la de ltar grub pa yin snyam du mi dpyod pa'i shes pa ma brtags par 'jug pa rnams so/ de nyid la ma dpyad pa'i shes pa zhes bya yi/ brtag pa ye mi byed pa min no//

39 See chapter 2, p. 41.

40 For example, Tsongkhapa writes: 'Therefore, in terms of the contents of our innate mind, there are those that can be negated by reasoning and those that cannot be thus negated.' *LTC*, p. 78.

41 *LTC*, p. 73: des na 'jig rten gyi grags pa ji ltar yin ni 'jig rten gyi rgan po grub mtha' dang bral ba kho na la 'dri ba ma yin gyi rgol phyi rgol gyi rgyud kyi ma dpyad pa'i blo'i 'jug thsul la 'ji ltar 'dug bltas pas chog pa yin no/ shes pa de la grags pa ni snang ba'am myong ba'i tha snyad 'dogs pa'i gzhir gyur pa rnams so/

42 Tsongkhapa cites the following verse from Nāgārjuna's *Lokātitastava* to substantiate this point:

> ma shes par ni shes bya min/
> de med rnam par shes med pa/
> de phyir shes dang shes bya dag/
> rang bzhin med par khyod kyis gsungs/ Quoted in *GR*, pp. 281–2.

43 *RG*, p. 406.

44 *LN*, p. 214: 'jig rten pas tha snyad btags pa'i don ji ltar khas len pa'i tshul dang ches mi thun pa la 'jig rten gyi tha snyad du yod pa'o zhes smras kyang don mi 'dod pas smras pa tsam du zad do//

45 *RG*, p. 47.

46 *LN*, p. 217: don dang tha snyad gnyis kyi nang nas don rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis yod par ma song ba na tha snyad kyi dang gis yod par 'os med kyis grub bo// I would like to thank Tom Tillemans for his suggestions that have helped to make the translation of this quote more readable. See also: ... yod par ni grub la don rang gi ngo bo nyid kyis yod par ma song ba na tha snad kyi dbang gis yod par grub bo// *RG*, p. 31.

47 Matilal (1971), p. 158.

48 Ruegg (1981), pp. 43, 75.
49 *LTC*, p. 193. Tsongkhapa gives a lengthy treatment of the process of arriving at an understanding of the illusion-like nature of persons in *LTC*, pp. 193–9.
50 *GR*, p. 135.
51 Matilal (1971), p. 134.
52 See the verses translated in chapter 4, p. 142.
53 *GR*, p. 138.
54 *LTC*, p. 194: sgyu ma'i don la gnyis gsungs te/ don dam bden pa sgyu ma lta bur gsungs pa lta bu yod pa tsam du grub kyang bden pa kegs pa la byas pa dang/ gzugs sogs la sgyu mar gsungs pa rang gi rang bzhin gyis stong bzhin du gzugs sogs su snang ba'i snang ba sgyu ma lta bu gnyis las/ 'dir ni phyi ma ste/
55 *LTC*, p. 194: dper na sgyu ma'i rta glang snang ba mig gi shes pas mthong ba dang/ snang ba ltar gyi rta glang med par yid kyi shes pas nges pa la brten nas rta glang du snang ba de sgyu ma'am brdzun pa'i snang bar nges pa skye ba de bzhin du ...
56 Ibid., p. 194.
57 This is reminscent of Nāgārjuna's argument in *MMK*, 24:14.
58 Crittendon (1981), p. 327.
59 *BCA*, 9:11–17.
60 *BCA*, 9:11.
61 Tsongkhapa treats this question extensively in *LTC*, pp. 58–78. There is also a lengthy discussion of some aspects of Prāsaṅgika epistemology in his *GR*, where he refutes the Cittamātra theory of self-cognizing awareness. See *GR*, pp. 281–300. For those interested in exploring Tsongkhapa's Madhyamaka epistemology in some depth, I would like to draw their attention to Ruegg (1991), which represents a highly authoritative study of the question. For an in-depth contemporary study of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka critique of realist epistemology in general, see Siderits (1981).
62 Tsongkhapa cites, in *LTC*, p. 59, the following from *MABh* to substantiate this point: mi bslu ba'i shes pa ni 'jig rten na tshad ma nyid du mthong ngo ...
63 *MA*, 6:31.
64 *LTC*, p. 70: de'i phyir dbu ma pas de dag 'krul par 'jog la de lta na y'ang yul brdzun pa 'jog pa mi 'gal te yul bden pa 'jog na ni yul can 'khrul pas 'jog par 'dod pa 'gal lo//
65 *naiva svataḥ prasiddhirna parasparataḥ parapramāṇair vā/*
na bhavati na ca prameyair na cāpy akasmāt pramāṇānām// VV, 51.
66 See chapter 4, p. 116.
67 tshad ma bzhi bshad pa rtsod zlog trsa 'grel la brten pa'o// *GR*, p. 295.
68 *LTC*, p. 59.
69 rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba gang//
de ni stong pa nyid bshad//
de ni brten nas bdags pa ste//
de nyid dbu ma'i lam yin no//

Yaḥ partītyasamuāpdaḥ śūnyatāṃ ṭāṃ pracakṣmahe/
sā pratjñāptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā// MMK, 24:18.
70 *LTC*, p. 35: de'i phyir blo gros dang ldan pa dag gis ni nges don gyi gsung rab dang de'i dgongs 'grel gyi bstan bcos dbu ma'i gzhung rnam par dag pa rnams nas stong pa nyid kyi don rten 'brel gyi don du gsungs pa mkhas pa dbu ma pa'i

khyad chos khyad par du slob dpon sangs rgyas bskyangs dang dpal ldan zla ba grags pas 'phags pa yab sras kyi dgongs pa lhag ma ma lus par dkral ba'i phra ba'i gnas/ rten 'brel la brten nas rang bzhin med pa la nges pa ster lugs dang rang bzhin gyis stong pa'i dngos po rnams rgyu 'bras su 'char tshul la gzhan gyis bkri bar mi nus pa'i nges pa drang bar bya'o//

71 For example, Gorampa's *lTa ba'i gshen 'byed* is structured in such a way that his own preferred position emerges as the genuine middle way free of extremes.

72 *RG*, p. 15.

73 skur 'debs kyi med mtha' . . ./ Ibid.

74 Ibid., p. 15: las 'bras la sogs pa'i chos rnams tha snyad du yod pa la tshad ma sus kyang gnod mi srid pas de dag yod pa min pa'am med par 'dzin pa'i yul yul can ni med mtha' dang de'i mthar 'dzin yin gyi sangs rgyas la skyon med ces pa lta bu med mtha' dang de'i mthar 'dzin min no//

75 dgag bya bkag pa'i med pa yang dag par yod do zhes 'dzin na dngos po med pa'i mthar' ltung bas de 'gog pa yang med mtha' 'gog pa yin no// *RG*, p. 15.

76 *RG*, pp. 281–2.

77 'od srung/ dbu ma'i chos rnams la yang dag par so sor rtog pa gang zhe na/ 'od srung/ gang la bdag med par so sor rtog pa dang sems can med pa dang srog med pa dang gso ba med pa dang skyes bu med pa dang gang zag med pa dang . . . 'o srung/ 'di ni dbu ma'i lam chos rnams la yang dag par so sor rtog pa zhe bya'o// Quoted in *LTC*, p. 249.

78 De tshe lta ba'i dpyad pa rdzogs pa lags/ *Three Principal Elements of the Path*, verse 12d.

79 thal 'gyur ba'i khyad chos la/ snang bas yod mtha' sel zhing/ stong nyid rgyu 'bras su 'gro tshul shes dgos la/ . . . *A Letter to Rendawa*, in *BTP*, p. 57; and also the following verse (13) from *Three Principal Elements of the Path*:

> gzhan yang snang bas yod mtha' sel ba dang//
> stong pas med mtha' sel zhing stong pa nyid//
> rgyu dang 'bras bur 'char ba'i tshul shes na//
> mthar 'dzin lta bas 'phrog par mi 'gyur ro//

80 See chapter 2, p. 68.

81 Taktsang Lotsawa, Mikyö Dorje, and Gendün Chöphel. Interestingly, as mentioned earlier, Gorampa considers Tsongkhapa a nihilist!

82 See chapter 1, p. 34.

83 Much of the discussion by Tibetan Mādhyamika scholars on the issue of objectivity versus subjectivity revolves around the debate about the allegedly conflicting perceptions of a cup of liquid between a human, a celestial being, and a hungry ghost. This debate is based on *MA*, 6:71a.

84 Matilal (1992), p. 349.

85 In *LTC*, p. 88, Tsongkhapa cites Āryadeva's *CS*, 12:13a to underline this point. He also quotes from *Samādhirājasūtra* (P795) to make a similar point in *LTC*, p. 8.

86 Ruegg (1981), Thurman (1982), Williams (1988).

87 *LTC*, p. 103.

88 *LTC*, p. 232.

89 Ibid.

90 See chapter 2, pp. 57–63.

91 See chapter 1, note 90.

92 *LN*, p. 224: de bzhin du rang bzhin med par ston pa'i lung rnams kyis rang bzhin bkag pa nyid rang bzhin med pa brjod pa dang/ rang bzhin 'gog pa'i rigs shes kyis rang bzhin bkag pa nyid rang bzhin med pa shes pa dang rang bzhin 'gog pa'i rtags kyis rang bzhin bkag pa nyid rang bzhin med pa bsgrubs par 'dod par bya yi/ lung la brjod bya dang shes pa la shes bya dang rtags la bsgrub bya med ces mi bya'o//

93 *LTC*, p. 242. Gorampa suggests that by making the absence of intrinsic existence the ultimate Tsongkhapa has fallen into nihilism. He argues that the emptiness of intrinsic existence constitutes only the second in the four-fold negation of the Madhyamaka dialectic, the remaining two being 'both is and is not,' and 'neither is nor is not.' Thus, he argues, Tsongkhapa's emptiness cannot be considered to be the total absence of all 'elaborations' (*spros pa*, *prapanca*) and thus cannot be considered as representing the final Madhyamaka standpoint. See *lTa ba'i shen 'byed*, pp. 7–9.

94 *LTC*, p. 8.

95 *LTC*, pp. 8–9.

96 *LTC*, pp. 7–8. This is reminiscent of Kamalaśīla's arguments in the *Bhāvanākramas* for the indispensability of both single-pointedness and analysis in one's path to full enlightenment. In fact, to underline this point Tsongkhapa cites from the *Bhāvanākramas* (P5310–3) in *LTC*, p. 10.

97 Tsongkhapa gives an extensive exposition of the stages of cultivating 'tranquil abiding of mind' in his *LRC*, pp. 468–563. For an English translation of this section, see Wayman (1978). For a table of the nine stages of mental development, see Thurman (1982), p. 133.

98 *LTC*, p. 241.

99 *LTC*, p. 238: bdag med pa'i don la phu thag chod pa'i lta b'ai nges pa med na lhag mthong gi rtog pa mi skye ste ...

100 Williams (1983), p. 128.

101 See Williams (1988), p. 208.

102 ... 'on kyang sgra rtog gi yul du gtan mi rung bar byar mi rung ste ... See *Scattered Writings of Tsongkhapa*, p. 265.

103 *LTCh*, p. 694: bya byed thams cad 'thad pa'i phyir chad stong min la/ chos rnams ye gdod ma nas de ltar stong pa la stongs par shes pa tsam yin pas blos byas kyi stong pa'ang min zhing/ shes by thams cad de ltar du 'dod pas nyi tshe ba'i stong pa'ang min pas/

104 Although Tsongkhapa does not identify any of the Tibetan critics of Candrakīrti by name, he dismisses them as being ignorant of the subtlety of Candrakīrti's views. See *GR*, p. 54. Most probably he has the epistemologist Chapa Chökyi Senge and the Jonangpas in mind. Shakya Chokden, in his *dBu ma rnam par nges pa* (chap. 2, pp. 518–49), lists most of Chapa's objections against Candrakīrti and provides brief responses to these. Interestingly, Chapa's own original work on Madhyamaka known as *dBu ma shar gsum gyi stong thun*, which was thought to have been lost for several centuries, was recently discovered in a Beijing library. The text has now been edited by Helmut Tauscher and recently made available as *Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskundie*, Heft 43. This text provides us with the full extent of Chapa's critique of Candrakīrti's thought. Since the writing of this study was completed before the publication of this valuable work by Chapa, I have not been able to incorporate its reading into my work.

105 *LTCh*, p. 694: de bsgoms pas bden 'dzin gyi mngon zhen mtha' dag gi gnyen por yang 'gro'o/ zab ma'i don de blo gang gi yang yul du mi rung ba min gyi yang dag pa'i lta bas gtan la phebs pa dang/ yang dag pa'i don sgom pa'i sgom pas yul du byed nus pas/ lam dus su nyams su len mi nus pa dang/ rig rgyu dang rtogs rgyu ci yang med pa'i stong pa yang min no//

106 See p. 169.

107 The author's colophon suggests that it was written as letter of advice to Tsakho Wönpo Ngagwang Drakpa. See *BTP*, pp. 8–10. For an English translation of the letter, see Thurman (1981).

108 rten 'brel mi slur mthong ba tsam nyid nas/
nges shes yul gyi 'dzin stangs kun zhig na/ Ibid.

109 *GR*, p. 123.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 stong nyid kyi lta ba'i go ba gnad du song pa'i theg chen pa/ Ibid., p. 123.

113 See *MA*, 6:6. For Tsongkhapa's comments on the passage, see *GR*, pp. 121–3.

Conclusion

1 Williams (1989, Spring), p. 5.

2 Ruegg (1980), p. 278.

3 Broido (1988).

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Wylie Transliteration of Tibetan Names

Bhaso Chökyi Gyaltsen	Bha so chos kyi rgyal mtshan
Butön (Rinchen Drup)	Bu ston
Butön Rinchen Drup	Bu ston rin chen grub
Cangkya Rolpai Dorje	lCang skya rol pa'i rdo rje
Chak Lostawa	Chag lo tsā ba
Chapa Chökyi Senge	Phya pa chos kyi seng ge
Dakpo Ngawang Drakpa (Gomchen)	Dags po ngag dbang grags pa
Desi Sangye Gyatso	sDe srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho
Drati Geshe Rinchen Dhöndup	Bra sti rin chen don grub
Drepung Loseling	'Bras spungs blo gsal gling
Drigong Palzin	'Bri gong dpal 'dzin
Druk Gyalwang Chöje	'Brug rgyal dbang chos rje
Dunkar Lobsang Trinley	Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las
Dzokchen	rDzogs chen
Ganden	dGa' ldan
Geluk	dGe lugs
Gendün Chöphel	dGe 'dun chos 'phel
Gö Khukpa Latse	'Gos khug pa lha rtse
Gö Lotsawa Shönu-pal	'Gos lo tsā ba gzhon nu dpal
Gomchen Ngagwang Drakpa (Dakpo)	sGoms chen ngag dbang grags pa
Gorampa (abbr. Gowo Rapjampa)	Go rams pa
Gowo Rapjampa Sönam Senge	Go bo rab 'byams pa bsod nams seng ge
Gungru Gyaltsen Sangpo	Gung ru rgyal mtshan bzang po
Guru Tashi Ngawang Lodrö	Gu ru bkra shis ngag dbang blo gros
Gyaltsap (Dharma Rinchen)	rGyal tshab
Gyaltsap Dharma Rinchen	rGyal tshab dhar ma rin chen
Gyalwang Chöje (Druk)	rGyal dbang chos rje
Jamyang Chöje Tashi Palden	'Jams dbyangs chos rje bkra shis dpal ldan
Jamyang Galo	'Jams dbyangs dga' blo
Jamyang Shepa Ngagwang Tsöndrü	'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa ngag dbang brtson grus
je yapse sum	rJe yab sras gsum

Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen	rJe btsun chos kyi rgyal mtshan
Jhampa Lingpa Sönam Namgyal	Byams pa gling pa bsod nams rnam rgyal
Jhanchup Lama	Byang chub bla ma
Jikme Dhamchö Gyatso	'Jigs me dam chos rgya mtsho
Jonang	Jo nang
Jonang Tāranātha	Jo nang tā ra nā tha
Ju Mipham (Namgyal Gyatso)	'Ju mi pham
Ju Mipham Namgyal Gyatso	'Ju mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho
Kadam	bKa' gdams
Kagyü	bKa' bryud
kangyur	bKa' 'gyur
Karmapa Mikyö Dorje	Kar ma pa mi bskyod rdo rje
Khedrup (Gelek Palsang)	mKhas grub
Khedrup Gelek Palsang	mKhas grub dge legs dpal bzang
Khenchen Ngagwang Rapten	mKhan chen ngag dbang rab brtan
Khenpo Chörin	mKhan po chos rin
Khu Lotsawa	Khu lo tsā ba
Lha Lama Yeshe Ö	Lha bla ma ye shes 'od
Lhodrak Drupchen	Lho brag grub chen
Lobsang Phüntsok	Blo bzang phun tshogs
Lotsawa Rinchen Sangpo	Lo tsā ba rin chen bzang po
Majha Jhangchup Tsöndrü	rMa bya byang chub brtson grus
Marpa Lotsawa	Mar pa lo tsā ba
Mipham (same as Ju Mipham)	Mi pham
Namkha Gyaltsen (Lodrak Drupchen)	Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan
Ngawang Palden	Ngag dbang dpal ldan
Ngok Loden Sherap	rNgog blo ldan shes rab
Nyingma	rNying ma
Ölkha	'Ol kha
Panchen Lobsang Chögyen	Paṇ chen blo bzang chos rgyan
Panchen Sönam Drakpa	Paṇ chen bsod nams grags pa
Patshap Lotsawa (Nyima Drak)	Pa tshab lo tsā ba
Patshap Nyima Drak	Pa tshab nyi ma grags
Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa	dPa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba
Pema Karpo, Drukpa	Pad ma dkar po, 'brug pa
Phurchok Ngagwang Jhampa	Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa
Rendawa Shönu Lodrö	Red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros
Rongtön Shakya Gyaltsen (Shejha Künrik)	Rong ston sha kyā rgyal mtshan
Rongtön Shejha Künrik	Rong ston shes bya kun rig
Sakya	Sa skya
Sakya Paṇdita	Sa skya paṇ di ta
Samye	bSam gyas
Sangphu	gSang phu
Sangpo Lotsawa Ngagwang	bZang po lo tsā ba ngag dbang
Sangsang Neringpa Chime Rapgye	Zang zang ne ring pa 'chi med rab rgyas
Sera Jetsünpa (Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen)	Se rva rje btsun pa
Serdok Panchen (Shakya Chokden)	gSer mdog paṇ chen
Shakya Chokden	Sha kyā mchog ldan

Shagkor Khensur Nyima Rinpoche	Sha 'khor mkhan zur nyi ma rin po che
Shamar Gendün Tenzin	Zha dmar dge 'dun bstan 'dzin
Shang Thangsakpa	Zhang thang sag pa
Shangchung Chöwang Drakpa	Zhang zhung chos dbang grags pa
Shentong	gZhan stong
Shiwa Ö	Zhi ba 'od
Sumpa Yeshe Paljor	Sum pa ye shes dpal 'byor
Taktsang Lotsawa (Sherap Rinchen)	sTag tshang lo stā ba
Taktsang Lotsawa Sherap Rinchen	sTag tshang lo stā ba shes rab rin chen
tangyur	bsTan 'gyur
Tashi Lhünpo	bKra shis lhun po
Thuken Chökyi Nyima	Thu'u kan chos kyi nyi ma
Trisong Detsen	Khri srong sde btsan
Tsami Lostawa	rTsa mi lo tsā ba
Tsangtön Kunga Gyaltsen	gTsang ston kun dga' rgyal mtshan
Tseten Shapdrung	Tse tan zhabs drung
Tsongkhapa (Lobsang Drakpa)	Tsong kha pa
Tsuklak Trengwa (Pawo)	gTsug lag phreng ba
Umapa Pawo Dorje	dBu ma pa dpa' bo rdo rje
Zemey Lobsang Palden	Dze smad blo bzang dpal ldan

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